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AGELESS STORIES

Jack Gibson

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INTRODUCTION

There is no exact definition of a short story. It may be quite long like *The Flood*, or it may be as short as Aesop's well known fable: *Dog and his Shadow*–and how direct and simple this story is: "A hungry spaniel having stolen a piece of flesh from a butcher's shop, was carrying it across a river. The water being clear, and the sun shining brightly, he saw his own image in the stream, and fancied it to be another dog with a more delicious morsel; upon which, unjustly and greedily opening his jaws to snatch at the shadow, he lost the substance."

Usually a story has a plot: that is, it is planned so as to have exciting, unexpected or amusing developments; sometimes to paint a word-picture, or suggest a moral; and sometimes to appeal to our sentiment or emotions. You can probably think of at least two morals or maxims suggested by Aesop's story of the dog and his reflection. In the story about Mordred and Arthur the plot is simple. The story develops from an unexpected happening and ends with that moving word-picture of what took place by moonlight. In *Mrs. Packletide's Tiger* the plot is more complicated, with many unexpected twists and turns. In *The Great Sermon Handicap* there is a double plot: Bingo Little's [illegible] of marrying Cynthia, and the Sermon Handicap itself—a light-hearted story, not to be taken seriously, much of it in the colloquial speech of fifty years ago, now as out of fashion as those narrow trousers that have given way to wide ones, or the even wider 'Oxford bags' we wore when I was young. In W.W. Jacobs' story by the night-watchman, another meant to amuse rather than edify, the language is that of a dock worker in London where the letter *H* is often dropped, and its absence, in the telling, marked by an

apostrophe. These are examples of different dialects or forms of speech peculiar to a district or to a class of people; but the meaning is clear, and this is not a treatise on grammar. If you want to be recognised as well educated, you may have to study grammar. At the end of the book are a few notes and suggestions that you may find helpful; but the aim of this collection is that you should enjoy the stories.

J.G.

How Mordred was Slain and Arthur Hurt to the Death

SIR THOMAS MALORY [1417-1471]

(The original language of this story has been modernised)

THE envoys agreed that King Arthur and Sir Mordred should meet between their armies, and that each of them should bring with him fourteen persons. They came and told this to King Arthur who said: "I am glad that this is done."

Before Arthur left to go into the field he warned his army that if they saw any sword drawn they should advance fiercely and slay the traitor Sir Mordred, for he did not trust him.

Sir Mordred likewise said to his army: "If you see any sword drawn, come on fiercely and kill all those who oppose you, for I have no faith in this treaty, knowing that my father wants to take vengeance on me."

So they met as had been arranged, and they came to a cordial agreement on a treaty of peace. Wine was fetched and as they were drinking an adder came out of a little heath bush and stung a knight on the foot.

When the knight felt himself bitten he looked down and saw the adder. Thinking of no other harm, he drew his sword to kill it.

As soon as the armies on each side saw that drawn sword, they blew their horns and trumpets, and, shouting grimly, advanced to battle. King Arthur, grieving at the unhappy day, took his horse and rode to his forces; and Sir Mordred did the same.

Never in Christendom was there seen a more sad and dismal battle. There was nothing but rushing and riding, lunging and striking. Many grim words were spoken and many deadly strokes were dealt.

In this way they fought all the long day and never stopped till the noble knights were laid on the cold ground. They fought on till it was near night, by when there were a hundred thousand lying dead.

Then was Arthur bitterly enraged, when he saw his people so lost to him. He looked about him and found that of all his army and of all his good knights there were no more still alive than Sir Lucan and his brother Sir Bedivere, and they were sorely wounded. "Jesu Mercy", said the King, "What has become of all my noble knights? Alas that I should see this unhappy day, for now I have met my doom; but, before God, I wish that I knew where was that traitor Sir Mordred who has caused all this mischief."

Then King Arthur saw where Sir Mordred leaned on his sword among a great heap of dead men. "Give me my spear," he said to Sir Lucan, "for there I see the traitor who has caused all this woe." "Sir, let him be," said Sir Lucan, "for he is unhappy; and if you survive this fatal day you will be well revenged upon him; for, blessed be God, you have won the field: for here we are three alive and with Sir Mordred is none alive. If you leave off now this wicked day of destiny is over."

"Whether I am to live or die," said the King, "now I see him yonder alone he shall never escape me, for I shall never have him at a better advantage."

"God speed you well," said Sir Bedivere.

Then the King took his spear in both his hands and ran towards Sir Mordred, crying, "Traitor, now is the day of your death." And when Sir Mordred heard King Arthur, he ran up to him with his drawn sword in his hand; but King Arthur stabbed him under his shield, thrusting his spear right through his body.

When Sir Mordred felt that he had his death wound he

pushed himself, with all the strength that he had, up to the grip of Arthur's spear, and struck his father Arthur on the side of the head with his sword held in both his hands. The sword pierced the helmet and skull, and Sir Mordred fell dead. The noble Arthur, he too fell to the ground and kept on fainting. As often as he did so, Sir Lucan and Sir Bedivere lifted him, and then weakly led him between them to a little chapel not far from the sea, where the King felt more easy. Then they heard people crying out in the battle-field, and the King told Sir Lucan to go and find out and tell him the meaning of the clamour; so Sir Lucan left, though he was grievously wounded in many places; and as he went he heard and saw by moon-light how robbers and plunderers had come into the field to pilfer and despoil many noble knights of broaches and beads, of rings and jewels; and those that were not fully dead, there they killed them for their armour and their riches.

The Flaming Tinman

GEORGE BORROW [1803-1881]

I stood stock-still, supporting the shaft of the little cart in my hand, and bending the right side of my face slightly towards the ground; but I could hear nothing; the noise which I thought I had heard was not one of those sounds which I was accustomed to hear in that solitude, the note of a bird, or the rustling of a bough; it was — there I heard it again, a sound very much resembling the grating of a wheel amongst gravel. Could it proceed from the road? Oh no! the road was too far distant for me to hear the noise of anything moving along it. Again I listened, and now I distinctly heard the sound of wheels, which seemed to be approaching the dingle; nearer and nearer they drew, and presently the sound of wheels was blended with the murmur of voices. Anon I heard a boisterous shout, which seemed to proceed from the entrance of the dingle. "Here are folks at hand," said I, letting the shaft of the cart fall to the ground; "is it possible that they can be coming here?"

My doubts on that point, if I entertained any, were soon dispelled; the wheels, which had ceased moving for a moment or two, were once again in motion, and were now evidently moving down the winding path which led to my retreat. Leaving my cart, I came forward and placed myself near the entrance of the open space, with my eyes fixed on the path down which my unexpected, and I may say unwelcome, visitors were coming. Presently I heard a stamping or sliding, as if of a horse in some difficulty; and then a loud curse, and the next moment appeared a man and a horse

and a cart; the former holding the head of the horse up to prevent him from falling, of which he was in danger, owing to the precipitous nature of the path. Whilst thus occupied, the head of the man was averted from me. When, however, he had reached the bottom of the descent, he turned his head, and perceiving me, as I stood bare-headed, without either coat or waistcoat, about two yards from him, he gave a sudden start, so violent, that the backward motion of his hand had nearly flung the horse upon his haunches.

"Why don't you move forward?" said a voice from behind, apparently that of a female; "you are stopping up the way, and we shall be all down upon one another." And I saw the head of another horse overtopping the back of the cart.

"Why don't you move forward, Jack?" said another voice, also of a female, yet higher up the path.

The man stirred not, but remained staring at me in the posture which he had assumed on first perceiving me, his body very much drawn back, his left foot far in advance of his right, and with his right hand still grasping the halter of the horse, which gave way more and more, till it was clean down on its haunches.

"What's the matter?" said the voice which I had last heard.

"Get back with you, Belle, Moll," said the man, still staring at me, "here's something not over-canny or comfortable."

"What is it?" said the same voice; "let me pass, Moll, and I'll soon clear the way," and I heard a kind of rushing down the path.

"You need not be afraid," said I, addressing myself to the man, "I mean you no harm; I am a wanderer like yourself—come here to seek for shelter—you need not be afraid; I am a Roman *chabo* by matriculation—one of the right sort, and no mistake—Good-day to ye, brother; I bid ye welcome."

The man eyed me suspiciously for a moment—then,

turning to his horse with a loud curse, he pulled him up from his haunches, and led him and the cart farther down to one side of the dingle, muttering as he passed me, "Afraid. H'm!"

I do not remember ever to have seen a more ruffianly-looking fellow; he was about six feet high, with an immensely athletic frame; his face was black and bluff, and sported an immense pair of whiskers but with here and there a grey hair, for his age could not be much under fifty. He wore a faded blue frock-coat, corduroys, and highlows; on his black head was a kind of red night-cap, round his bull neck a Barcelona handkerchief, I did not like the look of the man at all.

"Afraid," growled the fellow, proceeding to unharness his horse; "that was the word, I think."

But other figures were now already upon the scene. Dashing past the other horse and cart, which by this time had reached the bottom of the pass, appeared an exceedingly tall woman, or rather girl, for she could scarcely have been above eighteen; she was dressed in a tight bodice, and a blue stuff gown; hat, bonnet, or cap she had none, and her hair, which was flaxen, hung down on her shoulders unconfined; her complexion was fair, and her features handsome, with a determined but open expression—she was followed by another female, about forty, stout and vulgar-looking, at whom I scarcely glanced, my whole attention being absorbed by the tall girl.

"What's the matter, Jack?" said the latter, looking at the man.

"Only afraid, that's all," said the man, still proceeding with his work.

"Afraid at what—at that lad? why, he looks like a ghost—I would engage to thrash him with one hand."

"You might beat me with no hands at all," said I, "fair damsel, only by looking at me. I never saw such a face and figure, both regal—why, you look like Ingeborg, Queen of Norway; she had twelve brothers, you know, and could

lick them all, though they were heroes—

"'On Dovrefeld in Norway,
Were once together seen,
The twelve heroic brothers
Of Ingeborg the queen.'"

"None of your chaffing, young fellow," said the tall girl, "or I will give you what shall make you wipe your face; be civil, or you will rue it."

"Well, perhaps I was a peg too high," said I, "I ask your pardon—here's something a bit lower—

"'As I was jawing to the gav yeck divvus
I met on the drom miro Romany chi—'"

"None of your Romany chies, young fellow," said the tall girl, looking more menacingly than before, and clenching her fist, "you had better be civil, I am none of your chies; and, though I keep company with gipsies, or, to speak more proper, half-and-halfs, I would have you to know that I come of Christian blood and parents, and was born in the great house of Long Melford."

"I have no doubt," said I, "that it was a great house; judging from your size, I shouldn't wonder if you were born in a church."

"Stay, Belle," said the man, putting, himself before the young virago, who was about to rush on me, "my turn is first";—then, advancing to me in a menacing attitude, he said, with a look of deep malignity, "'Afraid' was the word, wasn't it?"

"It was," said I, "but I think I wronged you; I should have said, aghast, you exhibited every symptom of one labouring under uncontrollable fear."

The fellow stared at me with a look of stupid ferocity, and appeared to be hesitating whether to strike or not; ere he could make up his mind, the tall girl stepped forward, crying, "He's chaffing; let me at him"; and, before I could put myself on my guard, she struck me a blow on the face which had nearly brought me to the ground.

"Enough," said I, putting my hand to my cheek; "you

have now performed your promise, and made me wipe my face; now be pacified, and tell me fairly the grounds of this quarrel."

"Grounds!" said the fellow; "didn't you say I was afraid; and if you hadn't, who gave you leave to camp on my ground?"

"Is it your ground?" said I.

"A pretty question," said the fellow; "as if all the world didn't know that. Do you know who I am?"

"I guess I do," said I; "unless I am much mistaken, you are he whom folks call the 'Flaming Tinman'. To tell you the truth, I'm glad we have met, for I wished to see you. These are your two wives, I suppose; I greet them. There's no harm done—there's room enough here for all of us—we shall soon be good friends, I dare say; and when we are a little better acquainted, I'll tell you my history."

"Well, if that doesn't beat all!" said the fellow.

"I don't think he's chaffing now," said the girl, whose anger seemed to have subsided on a sudden; "the young man speaks civil enough."

"Civil," said the fellow, with an oath; "but that's just like you; with you it is a blow, and all over. Civil! I suppose you would have him stay here, and get into all my secrets and hear all I may have to say to my two morts."

"Two morts!" said the girl, kindling up, "where are they? Speak for one, and no more. I am no mort of yours, whatever someone else may be. I tell you one thing, Black John, or Anselo, for t'other an't your name, the same thing I told the young man here, be civil, or you will rue it."

The fellow looked at the girl furiously, but his glance soon quailed before hers; he withdrew his eyes, and cast them on my little horse, which was feeding among the trees. "What's this?" said he, rushing forward and seizing the animal. "Why, as I'm alive, this is the horse of that mumping villain Slingsby."

"It's his no longer; I bought it and paid for it."

"It's mine now," said the fellow; "I swore I would seize

it the next time I found it on my beat; ay, and beat the master too."

"I am not Slingsby."

"All's one for that."

"You don't say you will beat me?"

"Afraid was the word."

"I'm sick and feeble."

"Hold up your fists."

"Won't the horse satisfy you?"

"Horse nor bellows either."

"No mercy, then."

"Here's at you."

"Mind your eyes, Jack. There, you've got it. I thought so," shouted the girl, as the fellow staggered back from a sharp blow in the eye. "I thought he was chaffing at you all along."

"Never mind, Anselo. You know what to do—go in," said the vulgar woman, who had hitherto not spoken a word, but who now came forward with all the look of a fury; "go in apopli; you'll smash ten like he."

The Flaming Tinman took her advice, and came in bent on smashing, but stopped short on receiving a left-handed blow on the nose.

"You'll never beat the Flaming Tinman in that way," said the girl, looking at me doubtfully.

And so I began to think myself, when, in the twinkling of an eye, the Flaming Tinman disengaged himself of his frock-coat, and, dashing off his red night-cap, came rushing in more desperately than ever. To a flush hit which he received in the mouth he paid as little attention as a wild bull would have done; in a moment his arms were around me, and in another, he had hurled me down, falling heavily upon me. The fellow's strength appeared to be tremendous.

"Pay him off now," said the vulgar woman. The Flaming Tinman made no reply, but planting his knee on my breast, seized my throat with two huge horny hands. I gave myself up for dead, and probably should have been so in another

minute but for the tall girl, who caught hold of the handkerchief, which the fellow wore round his neck, with a grasp nearly as powerful as that with which he pressed my throat.

"Do you call that fair play?" said she.

"Hands off, Belle," said the other woman; "do you call it fair play to interfere? hands off, or I'll be down upon you myself."

But Belle paid no heed to the injunction, and tugged so hard at the handkerchief that the Flaming Tinman was nearly throttled; suddenly relinquishing his hold of me, he started on his feet, and aimed a blow at my fair preserver, who avoided it, but said coolly:—

"Finish t'other business first, and then I'm your woman whenever you like; but finish it fairly—no foul play when I'm by—I'll be the boy's second, and Moll can pick you up when he happens to knock you down."

The battle during the next ten minutes raged with considerable fury, but it so happened that during this time I was never able to knock the Flaming Tinman down, but on the contrary received six knock-down blows myself. "I can never stand this," said I, as I sat on the knee of Belle, "I am afraid I must give in; the Flaming Tinman hits very hard," and I spat out a mouthful of blood.

"Sure enough you'll never beat the Flaming Tinman in the way you fight—it's of no use flipping at the Flaming Tinman with your left hand; why don't you use your right?"

"Because I'm not handy with it," said I; and then getting up, I once more confronted the Flaming Tinman, and struck him six blows for his one, but they were all left-handed blows, and the blow which the Flaming Tinman gave me knocked me off my legs.

"Now, will you use Long Melford?" said Belle, picking me up.

"I don't know what you mean by Long Melford," said I, gasping for breath.

"Why, this long right of yours," said Belle, feeling my right arm—"if you do, I shouldn't wonder if you yet stand

a chance."

And now the Flaming Tinman was once more ready, much more ready than myself. I, however, rose from my second's knee as well as my weakness would permit me; on he came, striking left and right, appearing almost as fresh as to wind and spirit as when he first commenced the combat, though his eyes were considerably swelled, and his nether lip was cut in two; on he came, striking left and right, and I did not like his blows at all, or even the wind of them, which was anything but agreeable, and I gave way before him. At last he aimed a blow which, had it taken full effect, would doubtless have ended the battle, but owing to his slipping, the fist only grazed my left shoulder, and came with terrific force against a tree, close to which I had been driven; before the Tinman could recover himself, I collected all my strength, and struck him beneath the ear, and then fell to the ground completely exhausted, and it so happened that the blow which I struck the Tinker beneath the ear was a right-handed blow.

"Hurrah for Long Melford!" I heard Belle exclaim; "there is nothing like Long Melford for shortness all the world over."

At these words, I turned my head as I lay, and perceived the Flaming Tinman stretched upon the ground apparently senseless. "He is dead," said the vulgar woman, as she vainly endeavoured to raise him up; "he is dead; the best man in all the north country, killed in this fashion, by a boy." Alarmed at these words, I made shift to get on my feet; and, with the assistance of the woman, placed my fallen adversary in a sitting posture. I put my hand to his heart, and felt a slight pulsation—"He's not dead," said I, "only stunned; if he were let blood, he would recover presently." I produced a penknife which I had in my pocket, and, baring the arm of the Tinman, was about to make the necessary incision, when the woman gave me a violent blow, and, pushing me aside, exclaimed, "I'll tear the eyes out of your head if you offer to touch him. Do

you want to complete your work, and murder him outright, now he's asleep? you have had enough of his blood already." "You are mad," said I, "I only seek to do him service. Well, if you won't let him be blooded, fetch some water and fling it into his face, you know where the pit is."

"A pretty manoeuvre," said the woman; "leave my mard in the hands of you and that limmer, who has never been true to us; I should find him strangled, or his throat cut, when I came back." "Do you go," said I to the tall girl, "take the can and fetch some water from the pit." "You had better go yourself," said the girl, wiping a tear as she looked on the yet senseless form of the Tinker; "you had better go yourself if you think water will do him good." I had by this time somewhat recovered my exhausted powers, and, taking the can, I bent my steps as fast as I could to the pit; arriving there, I lay down on the brink, took a long draught and then plunged my head into the water, after which I filled the can, and bent my way back to the dingle. Before I could reach the path which led down into its depths, I had to pass some way along its side; I had arrived at a part immediately over the scene of the last encounter, where the bank, overgrown with trees, sloped precipitously down. Here I heard a loud sound of voices in the dingle; I stopped, and laying hold of a tree, leaned over the bank and listened. The two women apeared to be in hot dispute in the dingle. "It was all one to you, you limmer," said the vulgar woman to the other; "had you not interfered the old man would soon have settled the boy."

"I'm for fair play and Long Melford." said the other. "If your old man, as you call him, could have settled the boy fairly, he might, for all I should have cared, but no foul work for me; and as for sticking the boy with our gulleys when he comes back, as you proposed, I am not so fond of your old man or you that I should oblige you in it to my soul's destruction." "Hold your tongue, or I'll—"; I listened no farther, but hastened as fast as I could to the dingle. My adversary had just begun to show signs of

animation; the vulgar woman was still supporting him, and occasionally cast glances of anger at the tall girl who was walking slowly up and down. I lost no time in dashing the greater part of the water into the Tinman's face, whereupon he sneezed, moved his hands, and presently looked round him. At first his looks were dull and heavy and without any intelligence at all; he soon, however, began to recollect himself, and to be conscious of his situation; he cast a scowling glance at me, then one of the deepest malignity at the tall girl, who was still walking about without taking much notice of what was going forward. At last he looked at his right hand, which had evidently suffered from the blow against the tree, and a half-stifled curse escaped his lips. The vulgar woman now said something to him in a low tone, whereupon he looked at her for a moment, and then got upon his legs. Again the vulgar woman said something to him; her looks were furious, and she appeared to be urging him on to attempt something. I observed that she had a clasped knife in her hand. The fellow remained standing for some time as if hesitating what to do; at last he looked at his hand, and, shaking his head, said something to the woman which I did not understand. The tall girl, however, appeared to overhear him, and, probably repeating his words, said, "No, it won't do; you are right there, and now hear what I have to say—let bygones be bygones, and let us all shake hands, and camp here, as the young man was saying just now." The man looked at her, and then, without any reply, went to his horse, which was lying down among the trees, and kicking it up, led it to the cart, to which he forthwith began to harness it. The other cart and horse had remained standing motionless, during the whole affair which I have been recounting, at the bottom of the pass. The woman now took the horse by the head, and, leading it with the cart into the open part of the dingle, turned both round and then led them back till the horse and cart had mounted a little way up the ascent; she then stood still and

appeared to be expecting the man. During this proceeding Belle had stood looking on without saying anything; at last, perceiving that the man had harnessed his horse to the other cart, and that both he and the woman were about to take their departure, she said, "You are not going, are you?" Receiving no answer, she continued: "I tell you what, both of you, Black John, and you Moll, his mort, this is not treating me over civilly—however, I am ready to put up with it and go with you if you like, for I bear no malice. I'm sorry for what has happened, but you have only yourself to thank for it. Now, shall I go with you, only tell me?" The man made no manner of reply, but flogged his horse. The woman, however, whose passions were probably under less control, replied with a screeching tone, "Stay where you are, you jade, and may the curse of Judas cling to you—stay with the bit of a mullo whom you helped, and my only hope is that he may gulley you before he comes to be—Have you with us, indeed: after what's past, no, nor nothing belonging to you. Fetch, down your mailla go-cart and live here with your chabo." She then whipped on the horse and ascended the pass, followed by the man. The carts were light, and they were not long in ascending the winding path. I followed to see that they took their departure. Arriving at the top, I found, near the entrance, a small donkey-cart, which I concluded belonged to the girl. The tinker and his mort were already at some distance; I stood looking after them for a little time, then taking the donkey by the reins I led it with the cart to the bottom of the dingle. Arrived there, I found Belle seated on the stone by the fireplace. Her hair was all dishevelled, and she was in tears.

"They were bad people," said she, "and I did not like them, but they were my only acquaintance in the wide world."

A Serpent Mystery

W.H. HUDSON [1841-1922]

IT was not until after the discovery that a serpent was not necessarily dangerous to human beings, therefore a creature to be destroyed at sight and pounded to a pulp lest it should survive and escape before sunset, that I began to appreciate its unique beauty and singularity. Then, I met with an adventure which produced another and a new feeling in me, that sense of something supernatural in the serpent which appears to have been universal among peoples in a primitive state of culture and still survives in some barbarous or semi-barbarous countries, and in others, like Hindustan, which have inherited an ancient civilization.

The snakes I was familiar with as a boy up to this time were all of comparatively small size, the largest being the snake-with-a-cross. The biggest specimen I have ever found of this ophidian reptile was under four feet in length; but the body is thick, as in all the pit-vipers. Then, there was the green-and-black snake an inhabitant of the house, which seldom exceeded three feet; and another of the same genus, the most common snake in the country. One seldom took a walk or ride on the plain without seeing it. It was in size and shape like our common grass-snake, and was formerly classed by naturalists in the same genus, Coronella. It is quite beautiful, the pale greenish-grey body, mottled with black, being decorated with two parallel bright red lines extending from the neck to the tip of the fine-pointed tail. Of the others the most interesting was a still smaller snake, brightly coloured, the belly with alternate bands of

crimson and bright blue. This snake was regarded by every one as exceedingly venomous and most dangerous on account of its irascible temper and habit of coming at you and hissing loudly, its head and neck raised, and striking at your legs. But this was all swagger on the snake's part: it was not venomous at all, and could do no more harm by biting than a young dove in its nest by puffing itself up and striking at an intrusive hand with its soft beak.

Then one day I came upon a snake quite unknown to me. I had never heard of the existence of such a snake in our parts, and I imagine its appearance would have strongly affected any one in any land, even in those abounding in big snakes. The spot, too, in our plantation where I found it, served to make its singular appearance more impressive.

There existed at that time a small piece of waste ground about half an acre in extent, where there were no trees and where nothing planted by man would grow. It was at the far end of the plantation, adjoining the thicket of fennel and the big red willow tree on the edge of the moat. This ground had been ploughed and dug up again and again, and planted with trees and shrubs of various kinds which were supposed to grow on any soil, but they had always languished and died, and no wonder, since the soil was a hard white clay resembling china clay. But although trees refused to grow there it was always clothed in a vegetation of its own; all the hardiest weeds were there, and covered the entire barren area to the depth of a man's knees. These weeds had thin wiry stalks and small sickly leaves and flowers, and would die each summer long before their time. This barren piece of ground had a great attraction for me as a small boy, and I visited it daily and would roam about it among the miserable half-dead weeds with the sun-baked clay showing between the brown stalks, as if it delighted me as much as the alfalfa field, blue and fragrant in its flowering time and swarming with butterflies.

One hot day in December I had been standing perfectly still for a few minutes among the dry weeds when a slight

rustling sound came from near my feet, and glancing down I saw the head and neck of a large black serpent moving slowly past me. In a moment or two the flat head was lost to sight among the close-growing weeds, but the long body continued moving slowly by—so slowly that it hardly appeared to move, and as the creature must have been not less than six feet long, and probably more, it took a very long time, while I stood thrilled with terror, not daring to make the slightest movement, gazing down upon it. Although so long it was not a thick snake, and as it moved on over the white ground it had the appearance of a coal-black current flowing past me—a current not of water or other liquid but of some such element as quicksilver moving on in a rope-like stream. At last it vanished, and turning I fled from the ground, thinking that never again would I venture into or near that frightfully dangerous spot in spite of its fascination.

Nevertheless I did venture. The image of that black mysterious serpent was always in my mind from the moment of waking in the morning until I fell asleep at night. Yet I never said a word about the snake to any one; it was my secret, and I knew it was a dangerous secret, but I did not want to be told not to visit that spot again. And I simply could not keep away from it; the desire to look again at that strange being was too strong. I began to visit the place again, day after day, and would hang about the borders of the barren weedy ground watching and listening, and still no black serpent appeared. Then one day I ventured, though in fear and trembling, to go right in among the weeds, and still finding nothing began to advance step by step until I was right in the middle of the weedy ground and stood there a long time, waiting and watching. All I wanted was just to see it once more, and I had made up my mind that immediately on its appearance, if it did appear, I would take to my heels. It was when standing in this central spot that once again that slight rustling sound, like that of a few days before, reached my straining sense and sent an icy chill

down my back. And there, within six inches of my toes, appeared the black head and neck, followed by the long, seemingly endless body. I dared not move, since to have attempted flight might have been fatal. The weeds were thinnest there, and the black head and slow-moving black coil could be followed by the eye for a little distance. About a yard from me there was a hole in the ground about the circumference of a breakfast cup at the top, and into this hole the serpent put his head and slowly, slowly drew himself in, while I stood waiting until the whole body to the tip of the tail had vanished and all danger was over.

I had seen my wonderful creature, my black serpent unlike any serpent in the land, and the excitement following the first thrill of terror was still on me, but I was conscious of an element of delight in it, and I would not now resolve not to visit the spot again. Still, I was in fear, and kept away three or four days. Thinking about the snake I formed the conclusion that the hole he had taken refuge in was his den, where he lived, that he was often out roaming about in search of prey, and could hear footsteps at a considerable distance, and that when I walked about at that spot my footsteps disturbed him and caused him to go straight to his hole to hide himself from a possible danger. It struck me that if I went to the middle of the ground and stationed myself near the hole, I would be sure to see him. It would indeed be difficult to see him any other way, since one could never know in which direction he had gone out to seek for food. But no, it was too dangerous; the serpent might come upon me unawares and would probably resent always finding a boy hanging about his den. Still, I could not endure to think I had seen the last of him, and day after day I continued to haunt the spot, and going a few yards into the little weedy wilderness would stand and peer, and at the slightest rustling sound of an insect or falling leaf would experience a thrill of fearful joy, and still the black majestical creature failed to appear.

One day in my eagerness and impatience I pushed my way

through the crowded weeds right to the middle of the ground and gazed with a mixed delight and fear at the hole: would he find me there, as on a former occasion? Would he come? I held my breath, I strained my sight and hearing in vain, the hope and fear of his appearance gradually died out, and I left the place bitterly disappointed and walked to a spot about fifty yards away, where the mulberry trees grew on the slope of the mound inside the moat.

Looking up into the masses of big clustering leaves over my head I spied a bat hanging suspended from a twig. The bats, I must explain, in that part of the world, that illimitable plain where there were no caverns and old buildings and other dark places to hide in by day, are not so intolerant of the bright light as in other lands. They do not come forth until the evening, but by day they are content to hitch themselves to the twig of a tree under a thick cluster of leaves and rest there until it is dark.

Gazing up at this bat suspended under a big green leaf, wrapped in his black and buff-coloured wings as in a mantle, I forgot my disappointment, forgot the serpent, and was so entirely taken up with the bat that I paid no attention to a sensation like a pressure or a dull pain on the instep of my right foot. Then the feeling of pressure increased and was very curious and was as if I had a heavy object like a crowbar lying across my foot, and at length I looked down at my feet, and to my amazement and horror spied the great black snake slowly drawing his long coil across my instep! I dared not move, but gazed down fascinated with the sight of that glistening black cylindrical body drawn so slowly over my foot. He had come out of the moat, which was riddled at the sides with rat-holes, and had most probably been there hunting for rats when my wandering footsteps disturbed him and sent him home to his den; and making straight for it, as his way was, he came to my foot, and instead of going round drew himself over it. After the first spasm of terror I knew I was perfectly safe, that he would not turn upon me so long as I remained quiescent,

and would presently be gone from sight. And that was my last sight of him; in vain I watched and waited for him to appear on many subsequent days: but that last encounter had left in me a sense of a mysterious being, dangerous on occasion as when attacked or insulted, and able in some cases to inflict death with a sudden blow, but harmless and even friendly or beneficent towards those who regarded it with kindly and reverent feelings in place of hatred. It is in part the feeling of the Hindu with regard to the cobra which inhabits his house and may one day accidentally cause his death, but is not to be persecuted.

How Uncle Podger Hangs a Picture

JEROME K. JEROME [1859-1927]

HE always reminds me of my poor Uncle Podger. You never saw such a commotion up and down a house in all your life, as when my Uncle Podger undertook to do a job. A picture would have come home from the frame-maker's, and be standing in the dining-room, waiting to be put up; and Aunt Podger would ask what was to be done with it, and Uncle Podger would say:

'Oh, you leave that to *me*. Don't you, any of you, worry yourselves about that, *I'll* do all that.'

And then he would take off his coat, and begin. He would send the girl out for sixpennyworth of nails, and then one of the boys after her to tell her what size to get; and from that, he would gradually work down, and start the whole house.

'Now you go and get me my hammer, Will,' he would shout; 'and bring me the rule, Tom; and I shall want the step-ladder, and I had better have a kitchen chair, too; and Jim! you run round to Mr. Goggles, and tell him, "Pa's kind regards and hopes his leg's better; and will he lend him his spirit-level?" And don't you go, Maria, because I shall want somebody to hold me the light; and when the girl comes back she must go out again for a bit of picture-cord; and Tom!—where's Tom?—Tom, you come here; I shall want you to hand me up the picture.'

And then he would lift up the picture, and drop it, and it would come out of the frame, and he would try to save

the glass, and cut himself; and then he would spring round the room, looking for his handkerchief. He could not find his handkerchief, because it was in the pocket of the coat he had taken off, and he did not know where he had put the coat, and all the house had to leave off looking for his tools, and start looking for his coat; while he would dance round and hinder them.

'Doesn't anybody in the whole house know where my coat is? I never came across such a set in all my life—upon my word I didn't. Six of you!—and you can't find a coat that I put down not five minutes ago! Well, of all the—'

Then he'd get up, and find that he had been sitting on it, and would call out:

'Oh, you can give it up! I've found it myself now. Might just as well ask the cat to find anything as expect you people to find it.'

And when half an hour had been spent in tying up his finger, and a new glass had been got, and the tools, and the ladder, and the chair, and the candle had been brought, he would have another go, the whole family, including the girl, and the charwoman, standing round in a semi-circle, ready to help. Two people would have to hold the chair, and a third would help him up on it, and hold him there, and a fourth would hand him a nail, and a fifth would pass him up the hammer, and he would take hold of the nail, and drop it.

'There!' he would say, in an injured tone, 'now the nail's gone.'

And we would all have to go down on our knees and grovel for it, while he would stand on the chair, and grunt, and want to know if he was to be kept there all the evening.

The nail would be found at last, but by that time he would have lost the hammer.

'Where's the hammer? What did I do with the hammer? Great heavens! Seven of you, gaping round there, and you don't know what I did with the hammer!'

We would find the hammer for him, and then he would

have lost sight of the mark he had made on the wall, where the nail was to go in, and each of us had to get up on the chair beside him, and see if we could find it; and we would each discover it in a different place, and he would call us all fools, one after another, and tell us to get down. And he would take the rule, and remeasure, and find that he wanted half of thirty-one and three-eighths inches from the corner and would try to do it in his head, and go mad.

And we would all try to do it in our heads, and all arrive at different results, and sneer at one another. And in the general row, the original number would be forgotten, and Uncle Podger would have to measure it again.

He would use a bit of string this time, and at the critical moment, when the old fool was leaning over the chair at an angle of forty-five, and trying to reach a point three inches beyond what was possible for him to reach, the string would slip, and down he would slide on to the piano, a really fine musical effect being produced by the suddenness with which his head and body struck all the notes at the same time.

And Aunt Maria would say that she would not allow the children to stand round and hear such language.

At last, Uncle Podger would get the spot fixed again, and put the point of the nail on it with his left hand, and take the hammer in his right hand. And, with the first blow, he would smash his thumb, and drop the hammer, with a yell, on somebody's toes.

Aunt Maria would mildly observe that, next time Uncle Podger was going to hammer a nail into the wall, she hoped he'd let her know in time, so that she could make arrangements to go and spend a week with her mother while it was being done.

'Oh! you women, you make such a fuss over everything,' Uncle Podger would reply, picking himself up. 'Why, I like doing a little job of this sort.'

And then he would have another try, and at the second blow, the nail would go clean through the plaster, and half the hammer after it, and Uncle Podger be precipitated

against the wall with force nearly sufficient to flatten his nose.

Then we had to find the rule and the string again, and a new hole was made; and, about midnight, the picture would be up—very crooked and insecure, the wall for yards round looking as if it had been smoothed down with a rake, and everybody dead beat and wretched—except Uncle Podger.

'There you are,' he would say, stepping heavily off the chair on to the charwoman's corns, and surveying the mess he had made with evident pride. 'Why, some people would have had a man in to do a little thing like that!'

The Cabuliwallah

RABINDRANATH TAGORE [1861-1941]

MY five-year old daughter Mini cannot live without chattering. I really believe that in all her life she has not wasted a minute in silence. Her mother is often vexed at this, and would like to stop her prattle, but I would not. For Mini to be quiet is unnatural, and I cannot bear it long. And so my own talk with her is always lively.

One morning, for instance, when I was in the midst of the seventeenth chapter of my new novel, my little Mini stole into the room, and putting her hand into mine, said: 'Father! Ramdayal, the door-keeper, calls a crow a krow! He doesn't know anything, does he?"

Before I could explain to her the difference between one language and another in this world, she had embarked on the full tide of another subject. 'What do you think, Father? Bhola says there is an elephant in the clouds, blowing water out of his trunk, and that is why it rains!'

And then, darting off anew, while I sat still, trying to think of some reply to this: 'Father! what relation is Mother to you?'

With a grave face I contrived to say: 'Go and play with Bhola, Mini! I am busy!'

The window of my room overlooks the road. The child had seated herself at my feet near my table, and was playing softly, drumming on her knees, I was hard at work on my seventeenth chapter, in which Pratap Singh, the hero, has just caught Kanchanlata, the heroine, in his arms, and is about to escape with her by the third-storey window of the

castle, when suddenly Mini left her play, and ran to the window, crying: 'A Cabuliwallah! A Cabuliwallah!' And indeed, in the street below, there was a Cabuliwallah, walking slowly along. He wore the loose, soiled clothing of his people, and a tall turban; he carried a bag on his back, and boxes of grapes in his hand.

I cannot tell what my daughter's feelings were when she saw this man, but she began to call him loudly. 'Ah!' thought I; 'he will come in, and my seventeenth chapter will never be finished!' At that very moment the Cabuliwallah turned, and looked up at the child. When she saw this, she was overcome by terror, and running to her mother's protection, disappeared. She had a blind belief that inside the bag, which the big man carried, there were perhaps two or three other children like herself. The pedlar meanwhile entered my doorway and greeted me with a smile.

So precarious was the position of my hero and my heroine, that my first impulse was to stop and buy something, since Mini had called the man to the house. I made some small purchases, and we began to talk about Rahman, the Russians, the English, and the Frontier Policy.

As he was about to leave, he asked: 'And where is the little girl, sir?'

And then, thinking that Mini must get rid of her false fear, I had her brought out.

She stood by my chair, and looked at the Cabuliwallah and his bag. He offered her nuts and raisins, but she would not be tempted, and only clung the closer to me, with all her doubts increased.

This was their first meeting.

A few mornings later, however, as I was leaving the house, I was startled to find Mini, seated on a bench near the door, laughing and talking, with the great Cabuliwallah at her feet. In all her life, it appeared, my small daughter had never found so patient a listener, save her father. And already the corner of her little sari was stuffed with almonds

and raisins, the gift of her visitor. 'Why did you give her those?' I said, and taking out an eight-anna piece, I handed it to him. The man accepted the money without demur, and put it into his pocket.

Alas, on my return, an hour later I found the unfortunate coin had made twice its own worth of trouble! For the Cabuliwallah had given it to Mini; and her mother, catching sight of the bright round object, had pounced on the child with: 'Where did you get that eight-anna piece?'

'The Cabuliwallah gave it me,' said Mini cheerfully.

'The Cabuliwallah gave it you!' cried her mother greatly shocked, 'O Mini! how could you take it from him?'

I entered at that moment, and saving her from impending disaster, proceeded to make my own inquiries.

It was not the first or the second time, I found, that the two had met. The Cabuliwallah had overcome the child's first terror by a judicious bribe of nuts and almonds, and the two were now great friends.

They had many quaint jokes, which amused them greatly. Mini would seat herself before him, look down on his gigantic frame in all her tiny dignity, and with her face rippling with laughter would begin:

'O Cabuliwallah! Cabuliwallah! what have you got in your bag?'

And he would reply, in the nasal accents of the mountaineer: 'An elephant!' Not much cause for merriment, perhaps; but how they both enjoyed the fun! And for me, this child's talk with a grown-up man had always in it something strangely fascinating.

Then the Cabuliwallah, not to be behind hand would take his turn: 'Well, little one, and when are you going to your father-in-law's house?'

Now nearly every small Bengali maiden had heard long ago about her father-in-law's house; but we were a little new-fangled, and had kept these things from our child, so that Mini at this question must have been a trifle bewildered. But she would not show it, and with ready tact replied;

'Are you going there?'

Amongst men of the Cabuliwallah's class, however it is well known that the words father-in-law's house have a double meaning. It is a euphemism for jail, the place where we are well cared for, at no expense to ourselves. In this sense would the sturdy pedlar take my daughter's question. 'Oh' he would say, shaking his fist at an invisible policeman. 'I will thrash my father-in-law!' Hearing this, and picturing the poor discomfited relative, Mini would go off into peals of laughter in which her formidable friend would join.

These were autumn mornings, the very time of year when kings of old went forth to conquest; and I, without stirring from my little corner in Calcutta, would let my mind wander over the whole world. At the very name of another country, my heart would go out to it, and at the sight of a foreigner in the streets, I would fall to weaving a network of dreams—the mountains, the glens, and the forests of his distant land, with his cottage in their midst, and the free and independent life of far-away wilds. Perhaps scenes of travel are conjured up before me and pass and re-pass in my imagination all the more vividly, because I lead an existence so like a vegetable that a call to travel would fall upon me like a thunderbolt. In the presence of this Cabuliwallah, I was immediately transported to the foot of arid mountain peaks, with narrow little defiles twisting in and out amongst their towering heights. I could see the string of camels bearing the merchandise, and the company of turbanned merchants, some carrying their queer old firearms, and some their spears, journeying downward towards the plains. I could see—. But at some such point Mini's mother would intervene, and implore me to 'beware of that man.'

Mini's mother is unfortunately very timid. Whenever she hears noise in the streets, or sees people coming towards the house, she always jumps to the conclusion that they are either thieves, or drunkards, or snakes, or tigers, or malaria,

or cockroaches, or caterpillars. Even after all these years of experience, she is not able to overcome her terror. So she was full of doubts about the Cabuliwallah, and used to beg me to keep a watchful eye on him.

If I tried to laugh her fear gently away, she would turn round seriously, and ask me solemn questions:

Were children never kidnapped?

Was it not true that there was slavery in Cabul?

Was it so very absurd that this big man should be able to carry off a tiny child?

I urged that, though not impossible, it was very improbable. But this was not enough, and her dread persisted. But as it was a very vague dread, it did not seem right to forbid the man the house, and the intimacy went on unchecked.

Once a year, in the middle of January, Rahman, the Cabuliwallah, used to return to his own country, and as the time approached, he would be very busy, going from house to house collecting his debts. This year, however, he could always find time to come and see Mini. It might have seemed to a stranger that there was some conspiracy between the two, for when he could not come in the morning, he would appear in the evening.

Even to me it was a little startling now and then, suddenly to surprise this tall, loose-garmented man laden with his bags, in the corner of a dark room; but when Mini ran in smiling, with her 'O Cabuliwallah! Cabuliwallah! and the two friends, so far apart in age, subsided into their old laughter and their old jokes, I felt reassured.

One morning, a few days before he had made up his mind to go, I was correcting proof-sheets in my study. The weather was chilly. Through the window the rays of the sun touched my feet, and the slight warmth was very welcome. It was nearly eight o'clock, and early pedestrians were returning home with their heads covered. Suddenly I heard an uproar in the street, and looking out saw Rahman being led away bound between two policemen, and behind

them a crowd of inquisitive boys. There were bloodstains on his clothes, and one of the policemen carried a knife. I hurried out, and stopping them, inquired what it all meant. Partly from one, partly from another, I gathered that a certain neighbour had owed the pedlar something for a Rampuri shawl, but had denied buying it, and that in the course of the quarrel Rahman had struck him. Now, in his excitement, the prisoner began calling his enemy all sorts of names, when suddenly in a verandah of my house appeared my little Mini, with her usual exclamation: 'O Cabuliwallah! Cabuliwallah!' Rahman's face lighted up as he turned to her. He had no bag under his arm today, so that she could not talk about the elephant question: 'Are you going to your father-in-law's house?' Rahman laughed and said: 'That is just where I am going, little one!' Then seeing that the reply did not amuse the child, he held up his fettered hands. 'Ah!' he said 'I would have thrashed that old father-in-law, but my hands are bound!'

On a charge of murderous assault, Rahman was sentenced to several years' imprisonment.

Time passed, and he was forgotten. Our accustomed work in the accustomed place went on, and the thought of the once free mountaineer spending his years in prison seldom or never occurred to us. Even my light-hearted Mini, I am ashamed to say, forgot her old friend. New companions filled her life. As she grew older, she spent more of her time with girls. So much, indeed, did she spend with them that she came no more, as she used to do, to her father's room, so that I rarely had any opportunity of speaking to her.

Years had passed away. It was once more autumn, and we had made arrangements for our Mini's marriage. It was to take place during the Puja holidays. With Durga returning to Kailas, the light of our home also would depart to her husband's house, and leave her father's in shadow.

The morning was bright. After the rains, it seemed as though the air had been washed clean and the rays of the

sun looked like pure gold. So bright were they, that they made even the sordid brick walls of our Calcutta lanes radiant. Since early dawn the wedding-pipes had been sounding, and at each burst of sound my own heart throbbed. The wail of the tune, Bhairavi, seemed to intensify the pain I felt at the approaching separation. My Mini was to be married that night.

From early morning noise and bustle had pervaded the house. In the courtyard there was the canopy to be slung on its bamboo poles; there were chandeliers with their tinkling sound to be hung in each room and verandah. There was endless hurry and excitement. I was sitting in my study, looking through the accounts, when someone entered, saluting respectfully, and stood before me. It was Rahman, the Cabuliwallah. At first I did not recognise him. He carried no bag, his long hair was cut short and his old vigour seemed to have gone. But he smiled, and I knew him again.

'When did you come, Rahman?' I asked him.

'Last evening,' he said, 'I was released from jail.'

The words struck harshly upon my ears. I had never before talked with one who had wounded his fellow-man, and my heart shrank within itself when I realised this; for I felt the day would have been better-omened had he not appeared.

'There are ceremonies going on,' I said, 'and I am busy. Perhaps you could come another day?'

He immediately turned to go; but as he reached the door he hesitated, and said, 'May I not see the little one, sir, for a moment?' It was his belief that Mini was still the same. He had pictured her running to him as she used to do, calling 'O Cabuliwallah! Cabuliwallah!' He had imagined too that they would laugh and talk together, just as of old. Indeed, in memory of former days, he had brought, carefully wrapped up in a paper, a few almonds and raisins and grapes, obtained somehow or other from a countryman; for what little money he had, had gone.

I repeated: 'There is a ceremony in the house, and you will not be able to see anyone today.'

The man's face fell. He looked wistfully at me for a moment, then said 'Good morning,' and went out.

I felt a little sorry, and would have called him back, but I found he was returning of his own accord. He came close up to me and held out his offerings with the words: 'I have brought these few things, sir, for the little one. Will you give them to her?'

I took them, and was going to pay him, but he caught my hand and said: 'You are very kind, sir! Keep me in your memory. Do not offer me money!—You have a little girl: I too have one like her in my own home. I think of her, and bring this fruit to your child—not to make a profit for myself.'

Saying this, he put his hand inside his big loose robe, and brought out a small and dirty piece of paper. Unfolding it with great care, he smoothed it out with both hands on my table, It bore the impression of a little hand. Not a photograph, not a drawing. Merely the impression of an ink-smeared hand laid flat on the paper. This touch of the hand of his own little daughter he had carried always next to his heart, as he had come year after year to Calcutta to sell his wares in the streets.

Tears came to my eyes. I forgot that he was a poor Cabuli fruit-seller, while I was—. But no, what was I more than he? He also was a father.

That impression of the hand of his little Parvati in her distant mountain home reminded me of my own little Mini.

I sent for Mini immediately from the inner apartment. Many difficulties were raised, but I swept them aside. Clad in the red silk of her wedding-day, with the sandal paste on her forehead, and adorned as a young bride, Mini came and stood modestly before me.

The Cabuliwallah seemed amazed at the apparition. He could not revive their old friendship. At last he smiled

and said: 'Little one, are you going to your father-in-law's house?'

But Mini now understood the meaning of the word 'father-in-law', and she could not answer him as of old. She blushed at the question, and stood before him with her bridelike face bowed down.

I remembered the day when the Cabuliwallah and my Mini had first met, and I felt sad. When she had gone, Rahman sighed deeply and sat down on the floor. The idea had suddenly come to him that his daughter too must have grown up, while he had been away so long, and that he would have to make friends anew with her also. Assuredly he would not find her as she was when he left her. And besides, what might not have happened to her in these eight years?

The marriage-pipes sounded, and the mild autumn sunlight streamed round us. But Rahman sat in the little Calcutta lane, and saw before him the barren mountains of Afghanistan.

I took out a currency-note, gave it to him, and said: 'Go back to your daughter, Rahman, in your own country, and may the happiness of your meeting bring good fortune to my child!'

Having made this present, I had to curtail some of the festivities. I could not have the electric lights I had intended, nor the military band, and the ladies of the house were despondent about it. But to me the wedding-feast was all the brighter for the thought that in a distant land a long-lost father had met again his only child.

Dirty Work

W. W. JACOBS [1863-1943]

IT was nearly high-water, and the night-watchman, who had stepped aboard a lighter lying alongside the wharf to smoke a pipe, sat with half-closed eyes enjoying the summer evening. The bustle of the day was over, the wharves were deserted, and hardly a craft moved on the river. Perfumed clouds of shag (cheap tobacco) hovering for a time over the lighter, floated lazily towards the Surrey shore.

"There's one thing about my job," said the night-watchman slowly, "it's done all alone by yourself. There's no foreman a-hollering at you and offering you a penny for your thoughts, and no mates to run into you from behind with a loaded truck and then ask you why you didn't look where you were going to. From six o'clock in the evening to six o'clock next morning I'm my own master."

He rammed down the tobacco with an experienced forefinger and puffed contentedly.

"People like you'ud find it lonely (he continued, after a pause); I did at fust. I used to let people come and sit 'ere with me of an evening talking, but I got tired of it.

After that I kept myself to myself. Say wot you like, a man's best friend is 'imself. There's nobody else'll do as much for 'im, or let 'im off easier when he makes a mistake. If I felt a bit lonely I used to open the wicket in the gate and sit there watching the road, and p'r'aps pass a word or two with the policeman. Then something 'appened one night that made me take quite a dislike to it for a time.

I was sitting there with my feet outside, smoking a quiet

pipe, when I 'eard a bit of a noise in the distance. Then I 'eard people running and shouts of "Stop thief"; A man came along round the corner full pelt, and, just as I got up dashed through the wicket and ran on to the wharf. I was arter 'im like a shot, and got up to 'im just in time to see him throw something into the dock. And at the same moment I 'eard the other people run past the gate.

"Wot's up?" I ses collaring 'im.

"Nothing," he ses, breathing 'ard and struggling. "Let me go."

He was a little wisp of a man, and I shook 'im like a dog shakes a rat. I remembered my own pocket being picked, and I nearly shook the breath out of 'im.

"And now I'm going to give you in charge," I ses, pushing 'im along towards the gate.

"Wot for?" he ses, purtending to be surprised.

"Stealing," I ses.

"You've made a mistake," he ses; "you can search me if you like."

"More use to search the dock," I ses. "I see you throw it in. Now you keep quiet, else you'll get 'urt. If you get five years I shall be all the more pleased."

I don't know how he did it, but 'e did. He seemed to sink away between my legs, and afore I knew wot was 'appening, I was standing upside down with all the blood rushing to my 'ead. As I rolled over he bolted through the wicket, and was off like a flash of lightning.

A couple o'minutes arterwards the people wot I'ad 'eard run past came back again. There was a big fat policeman with'em—a man I'ad seen afore on the beat—and when they'ad gorn on, he stopped to 'ave a word with me.

" 'Ot work," he ses, taking off his 'elmet and wiping his bald 'ead with a large red handkerchief. "I've lost all my puff."

"Been running?" I ses, very perlite.

"Arter a pickpocket," he ses. "He snatched a lady's purse just as she was stepping aboard the French boat

with her 'usband. Twelve pounds in it in gold, two peppermint lozenges, and a postage stamp."

He shook his 'ead, and put his 'elmet on again.

"Holding it in her little 'and as usual," he ses. "Asking for trouble, I call it. I believe if a woman 'ad one hand off and only a finger and thumb left on the other, she'd carry'er purse in it."

He went on talking for a long time, but I was busy doing a bit of 'ead-work and didn't pay much attention to 'im. I was thinking o' twelve pounds, two lozenges, and a postage stamp laying in the mud at the bottom of my dock, and arter a time 'e sees as 'ow I was waiting to get back to my night's rest, and went off, stamping.

I locked the wicket when he 'ad gorn away, and then I went to the edge of the dock and stood looking down at the spot where the purse 'ad been chucked in. The tide was on the ebb, but there was still a foot or two of water atop of the mud. I walked up and down thinking.

I thought for a long time, and then I made up my mind. If I got the purse and took it to the police-station, the police would share the money out between 'em, and tell me they 'ad given it back to the lady. If I found it and put a notice in the newspaper—which would cost money—very likely a dozen or so ladies would come and see me and say it was theirs. Then if I gave it to the best-looking one and the one it belonged to turned up, there'd be touble. My idea was to keep it—for a time—and then if the lady who lost it came to me and asked me for it I would give it to 'er.

Once I had made up my mind to do wot was right I felt quite 'appy, and arter a look up and down, I stepped round to the Bear's Head and 'ad a couple o' goes o'rum to keep the cold out. There was nobody in there but the landlord, and 'e started at once talking about the thief, and 'ow he 'ad run arter him in 'is shirt-sleeves.

"My opinion is," he ses, "that 'e bolted on one of the wharves and 'id 'imself. He disappeared like magic. Was that little gate o'yours open?"

"I was on the wharf," I ses, very cold.

"You might ha'been on the wharf and yet not 'ave seen anybody come on," he ses, nodding.

"Wot d'ye mean?" I ses, very sharp.

"Nothing," he ses. "Nothing."

"Are you trying to take my character away?" I ses, fixing 'im with my eye.

"Lo' bless me, no!" he ses, staring at me. "It's no good to me."

He sat down in 'is chair behind the bar and went straight off to sleep with his eyes screwed up as tight as they would go. Then 'e opened his mouth and snored till the glasses shook. I suppose I've been one of the best customers he ever 'ad, and that's the way he treated me. For two pins I'd ha' knocked 'is ugly 'ead off, but arter waking him up very sudden by dropping my glass on the floor I went off back to the wharf.

I locked up again, and 'ad another look at the dock. The water 'ad nearly gone and the mud was showing in patches. My mind went back to a sailorman wot had dropped 'is watch overboard two years before, and found it by walking about in the dock in 'is bare feet. He found it more easy because the glass broke when he trod on it.

The evening was a trifle chilly for June, but I've been used to roughing it all my life, especially when I was afloat, and I went into the office and began to take my clothes off. I took off everything but my pants, and I made sure o' them by making braces for 'em out of a bit of string. Then I turned the gas low, and, arter slipping on my boots, went outside.

It was so cold that at fust I thought I'd give up the idea. The longer I stood on the edge looking at the mud the colder it looked, but at last I turned round and went slowly down the ladder. I waited a moment at the bottom, and was just going to step off when I remembered that I 'ad got my boots on, and I 'ad to go up agin and take 'em off.

I went down very slow the next time, and anybody who

'as been down an iron ladder with thin, cold rungs, in their bare feet, will know why, and I had just dipped my left foot in, when the wharf-bell rang.

I 'oped at fust that it was a runaway ring, but it kept on, and the longer it kept on the worse it got. I went up that ladder agin and called out .t I was coming, and then I went into the office and just slipped on my coat and trousers and went to the gate.

"Wot d'you want?" I ses, opening the wicket* three or four inches and looking out at a man wot was standing there.

"Are you old Bill?" he ses.

"I'm the watchman," I ses, sharp-like. "Wot d'ye want?"

"Don't bite me!" he ses, purtending to draw back. "I ain't done no 'arm. I've come round about that glass you smashed at the Bear's Head."

"Glass!" I ses, 'ardly able to speak.

"Yes, glass," he ses—"thing wot yer drink out of. The landlord says it'll cost you a tanner, and 'e wants it now in case you pass away in your sleep. He couldn't come 'imself 'cos he's got nobody to mind the bar, so 'e sent me. Why! Halloa! Where's your boots? Ain't you afraid o' ketching cold?"

"You clear off," I ses, shouting at him, "D'ye 'ear me? Clear off while you're safe, and you tell the landlord that next time 'e insults me I'll smash every glass in 'is place and then sit 'im on top of 'em! Tell 'im if 'e wants a tanner out o'me, to come round 'imself, and see wot he gets."

It was a silly thing to say, and I saw it arterwards, but I was in such a temper I 'ardly knew wot I was saying. I slammed the wicket in 'is face and turned the key, and then I took off my clothes and went down that ladder agin.

It seemed colder than ever, and the mud when I got fairly into it was worse than I thought it could ha' been.

* a small door in a large one

It stuck to me like glue, and every step I took seemed colder than the one before. 'Owever, when I make up my mind to do a thing, I do it. I fixed my eyes on the place where I thought the purse was, and every time I felt anything under my foot I reached down and picked it up—and then chucked it away as far as I could so as not to pick it up agin. Dirty job it was, too, and in five minutes I was mud up to the neck a'most. And I 'ad just got to wot I thought was the right place, and feeling about very careful, when the bell rang agin.

I thought I should ha' gorn out o' my mind. It was just a little tinkle at first, then another tinkle, but as I stood there all in the dark and cold trying to make up my mind to take no notice of it, it began to ring like mad. I 'ad to go—I've known men climb over the gate afore now—and I didn't want to be caught in that dock.

The mud seemed stickier than ever, but I got out at last, and, arter scraping some of it off with a bit of stick, I put on my coat and trousers and boots just as I was and went to the gate, with the bell going its 'ardest all the time,

When I opened the gate and see the landlord of the Bear's Head standing there I turned quite dizzy, and there was a noise in my ears like the roaring of the sea. I should think I stood there for a couple o' minutes without being able to say a word. I couldn't think of 'em.

"Don't be frightened, Bill, ses the landlord, "I'm not going to eat you."

"He looks as if he's walking in 'is sleep," ses the fat policeman, wot was standing near by. "Don't startle 'im."

"He always looks like that," ses the landlord. I stood looking at 'im. I could speak then, but I couldn't think of any words good enough; not with a policeman standing by with a note-book in 'is pocket.

"Wot was you ringing my bell for?" I ses, at last.

"Why didn't you answer it before?" ses the landlord. "D'you think I've got nothing better to do than to stand

ringing your bell for three-quarters of an hour? Some people would report you."

"I know my dooty," I ses; "there's no craft up to-night, and no reason for anybody to come to my bell. If I was to open the gate every time a parcel of overgrown boys rang my bell I should 'ave enough to do."

"Well, I'll overlook it this time, seeing as you're an old man and couldn't get another sleeping-in job," he ses, looking at the policeman for him to see 'ow clever 'e was. "Wot about that tanner? That's wot I've come for."

"You be off," I ses, starting to shut the wicket. "You won't get no tanner out of me."

"All right," he ses, "I shall stand here and go on ringing the bell till you pay up, that's all."

He gave it another tug, and the policeman, instead of locking 'im up for it, stood there laughing.

I gave 'im the tanner. It was no use standing there arguing over a tanner, with a purse of twelve quid waiting for me in the dock, but I told 'im wot people thought of 'im.

"Arf a second, watchman," ses the policeman, as I started to shut the wicket agin. "You didn't see anything of the pickpocket, did you?"

"I did not," I ses.

"Cos this gentleman thought he might 'ave come in here," ses the policeman.

"'Ow could he 'ave come in here without me knowing it?" I ses, firing up.

"Easy," ses the landlord, "and stole your boots into the bargain."

"He might 'ave come when your back was turned," ses the policeman, "and if so, he might be 'iding there now. I wonder whether you'd mind me having a look round?"

"I tell you he ain't here," I ses, very short, "but to ease your mind, I'll 'ave a look round myself arter you've gorn."

The policeman shook his 'ead. "Well o' course, I can't come in without your permission," he ses, with a little

cough, "but I 'ave an idea that if it was your guv'nor 'ere instead of you, he'd ha' been on'y too pleased to do anything 'e could to help the law. I'll beg his pardon tomorrow for asking you, in case he might object."

That settled it. That's the police all over, and that's 'ow they get their way and do as they like. I could see 'im in my mind's eye talking to the guv'nor, and letting out little things about broken glasses and such-like by accident. I drew back to let 'im pass, and I was so upset that when that little rat of a landlord follered 'im I didn't say a word.

I stood and watched them poking and prying about the wharf as if it belonged to 'em, with the light from the policeman's lantern flashing about all over the place. I was shivering with cold and temper. The mud was drying on me, and I couldn't 'elp noticing the smell of it. Nobody could. And wot was worse than all was, that the tide 'ad turned and was creeping over the mud in the dock.

They got tired of it at last, and came back to where I was and stood there shaking their 'eads at me.

"If he was on the wharf 'e must 'ave made his escape while you was in the Bear's Head," ses the policeman.

"He *was* in my place a long time," ses the landlord.

"Well, it's no use crying over spilt milk," ses the policeman. "Funny smell about 'ere, ain't there?" he ses, sniffing, and turning to the landlord. "Wot is it?"

"I dunno," ses the landlord. "I noticed it while we was talking to 'im at the gate. It seems to foller 'im about."

"I've smelt things I like better," ses the policeman, sniffing agin. "It's just like the foreshore when somebody 'as been stirring the mud up a bit."

"If you've finished 'unting for the pickpocket I'll let you out and get on with my work," I ses, drawing myself up.

"Good night," ses the policeman, moving off.

"Good night, dear," ses the landlord, "Mind you tuck yourself up warm."

I lost my temper for a moment, and afore I knew wot I was doing I 'ad got hold of him and was shoving 'im to-

wards the gate as 'ard as I could shove. He pretty near got my coat off in the struggle, and next moment the policeman 'ad turned his lantern on me and they was both staring at me as if they couldn't believe their eyesight.

"He—he's turning black!" ses the landlord.

"He's turned black!" ses the policeman.

They both stood there looking at me with their mouths open, and then afore I knew wot he was up to, the policeman came close up to me and scratched my chest with his finger-nail.

"It's mud!" he ses.

"You keep your nails to yourself," I ses. "It's nothing to do with you."

"Unless it's a case of 'tempted suicide," he ses looking at me very 'ard.

"Ah!" ses the landlord.

"There's no mud on 'is clothes," ses the policeman, looking me over with his lantern agin. "He must 'ave gone in naked, but I should like to see 'is legs to make—All right! All right ! Keep your 'air on."

"You look after your own legs, then," I ses very sharp, "and mind your own business."

"It is my business," he ses, turning to the landlord. "Was 'e strange in his manner at all when 'e was in your place to-night?"

"He smashed one o' my best glasses," ses the landlord.

"So he did," ses the policeman. "So he did. I'd forgot that. Do you know 'im well?"

"Not more than I can 'elp," ses the landlord. "He's been in my place a good bit, but I never knew of any reason why 'e should try and do away with 'imself. If he's been disappointed in love, he ain't told me anything about it."

I suppose that couple o' fools 'ud 'ave stood there talking about me all night if I'd ha' let 'em, but I'd had about enough of it.

"Look 'ere," I ses, "you're very clever, both of you, but you needn't worry your 'eads about me. I've just been

having a mud-bath, that's all."

"A *mud-bath* !" ses both of 'em, squeaking like a couple o' silly parrots.

"For rheumatics," I ses. "I 'ad it something cruel to-night, and I thought that p'r'aps the mud 'ud do it good. I read about it in the papers. There's places where you pay pounds for 'em, but, being a pore man, I 'ad to 'ave mine on the cheap."

The policeman stood there looking at me for a moment, and then 'e began to laugh till he couldn't stop imself.

"Love-a-duck !" he ses, at last, wiping his eyes. "I wish I'd seen it."

"Must ha' looked like a fat mermaid," ses the landlord, wagging his silly 'ead at me. "I can just see old Bill sitting in the mud a-combing his 'air and singing."

They 'ad some more talk o' that sort, just to show each other 'ow funny they was, but they went off at last, and I fastened up the gate and went into the office to clean myself up as well as I could. One comfort was they 'adn't got the least idea of wot I was arter, and I 'ad a fancy that the one as laughed last would be the one as got that twelve quid.

I was so tired that I slept nearly all day arter I 'ad got 'ome, and I 'ad no sooner got back to the wharf in the evening than I see that the landlord 'ad been busy. If there was one silly fool that asked me the best way of making mudpies, I should think there was fifty. Little things please little minds, and the silly way some of 'em went on made me feel sorry for my sects.

By eight o'clock, 'owever, they 'ad all sheered off, and I got a broom and began to sweep up to 'elp pass the time away until low-water. On'y one craft 'ad come up that day—a ketch called the Peewit—and as she was berthed at the end of the jetty she wasn't in my way at all.

Her skipper came on the wharf just afore ten. Fat, silly old man 'e was, named Fogg. Always talking about 'is 'ealth and taking medicine to do it good. He came up to

me slow like, and, when 'e stopped and asked me about the rheumatics, the broom shook in my 'and,

"Look here," I ses, "if you want to be funny, go and be funny with them as likes it. I'm fair sick of it, so I give you warning."

"Funny?" he ses, staring at me with eyes like a cow. "Wot d'ye mean? There's nothing funny about rheumatics; I ought to know; I'm a martyr to it. Did you find as 'ow the mud did you any good?"

I looked at 'im hard, but 'e stood there looking at me with his fat baby-face, and I knew he didn't mean any 'arm; so I answered 'im perlite and wished 'im good night.

"I've 'ad pretty near everything a man can have," he ses, casting anchor on empty box, "but I think the rheumatics was about the worst of 'em all. I even tried bees for it once."

"Bees!" I ses. *"Bees !"*

"Bee-stings," he ses. "A man told me that if I could on'y persuade a few bees to sting me, that 'ud cure me. I don't know what 'e meant by persuading; they didn't *want* no persuading. I took off my coat and shirt and went and rocked one of my neighbour's bee-hives next door, and I thought my last hour 'ad come."

He sat on that box and shivered at the memory of it.

"Now I take Dr Pepper's pellets instead," he ses. "I've got a box in my state-room, and if you'd like to try 'em your're welcome."

He sat there talking about the complaints he had 'ad and wot he 'ad done for them till I thought I should never have got rid of 'im. He got up at last, though, and arter telling me to always wear flannel next to my skin, climbed aboard and went below.

I knew the hands was aboard, and arter watching 'is cabin skylight until the light was cut, I went and undressed. Then I crept back on to the jetty, and arter listening by the *Peewit* to make sure that they was all asleep, I went back and climbed down the ladder.

It was colder than ever. The cold seemed to get into my bones, but I made up my mind to 'ave that twelve quid if I died for it. I trod round and round the place where I 'ad seen that purse chucked in until I was tired, and the rubbish I picked up by mistake you wouldn't believe.

I suppose I 'ad been in there arf an hour, and I was standing up with my teeth clenched to keep them from chattering, when I 'appened to look round and see something like a white ball coming down the ladder. My 'art seemed to stand still for a moment, and then it began to beat as though it would bust. The white thing came down lower and lower, and then all of a sudden it stood in the mud and said, *"Ow!"*

"Who is it?" I ses. "Who are you?"

"Halloa, Bill !" it ses. "Ain't it perishing cold ?"

It was the voice o' Cap'n Fogg, and if ever I wanted to kill a fellow-creetur, I wanted to then.

" 'Ave you been in long, Bill ?" he ses.

"About ten minutes," I ses, grinding my teeth.

"Is it doing you good ?" he ses.

I didn't answer 'im.

"I was just going off to sleep," he ses, "when I felt a sort of hot pain in my left knee. O' course, I knew wot it meant at once, and instead o' taking some of the pellets I thought I'd try your remedy instead. It's a bit nippy, but I don't mind that if it does me good."

He laughed a silly sort o' laugh, and then I'm blest if 'e didn't sit down in that mud and waller in it. Then he'd get up and come for'ard two or three steps and sit down agin.

"Ain't you sitting down, Bill ?" he ses, arter a time.

"No," I ses, "I'm not."

"I don't think you can expect to get the full benefit unless you do," he ses, coming up close to me and sitting down agin. "It's a bit of a shock at fust, but—Halloa !"

"Wot's up ?" I ses.

"Sitting on something hard," he ses. "I wish people

'ud be more careful."

He took a list to port and felt under the starboard side. Then he brought his 'and up and tried to wipe the mud off and see wot he 'ad got.

"Wot is it ?" I ses, with a nasty sinking sort o' feeling inside me.

"I don't know," he ses, going on wiping. "It's soft outside and 'ard inside. It——"

"Let's 'ave a look at it," I ses, holding out my 'and.

"It's nothing," he ses, in a queer voice, getting up and steering for the ladder. "Bit of oyster-shell, I think."

He was up that ladder hand over fist, with me close behind 'im, and as soon as he 'ad got on to the wharf started to run to 'is ship.

"Good night, Bill," he ses, over 'is shoulder.

"Arf a moment," I ses, follering 'im.

"I must get aboard," he ses; "I believe I've got a chill," and afore I could stop 'im he 'ad jumped on and run down to 'is cabin.

I stood on the jetty for a minute or two trembling all over with cold and temper. Then I saw he 'had got a light in 'is cabin and I crept aboard and peeped down the skylight. And I just 'ad time to see some sovereigns on the table, when he looked up and blew out the light.

Rikki-Tikki-Tavi *(Shortened)*

RUDYARD KIPLING [1865-1936]

THIS is the story of the great war that Rikki-tikki-tavi fought single-handed, through the bath-rooms of the big bungalow in Segowlee cantonment. *Darzee,* the tailor-bird helped him, and *Chuchundra*, the musk-rat, who never comes out into the middle of the floor, but always creeps round by the wall, gave him advice; but Rikki-tikki did the real fighting.

He was a mongoose. His eyes and the end of his restless nose were pink; he could scratch himself anywhere he pleased with any leg, front or back, that he chose to use; he could fluff up his tail till it looked like a bottle-brush, and his war-cry as he scuttled through the long grass was: Rikk-tikk-tikki-tikki-tchk!

One day, a high summer flood washed him out of the burrow where he lived and carried him, kicking and clucking down a roadside ditch. He found a little wisp of grass floating there, and clung to it till he lost his senses. When he revived, he was lying in the hot sun on the middle of a garden path, very draggled indeed, and a small boy was saying, 'Here's a dead mongoose. Let's have a funeral.'

'No,' said his mother: 'let's take him in and dry him. Perhaps he isn't really dead.'

They took him into the house, and a big man picked him up between his finger and thumb and said he was not dead but half choked; so they wrapped him in cotton-wool, and warmed him over a little fire, and he opened his eyes and sneezed.

It is the hardest thing in the world to frighten a mongoose, because he is eaten up from nose to tail with curiosity.

They gave him a little piece of raw meat. Rikki-tikki liked it immensely, and when it was finished he went out into the veranda and sat in the sunshine and fluffed up his fur to make it dry to the roots. Then he felt better. He spent all that day roaming over the house. And when Teddy went to bed Rikki-tikki climbed up too. Teddy's mother and father came in, the last thing, to look at their boy, and Rikki-tikki was awake on the pillow. 'I don't like that,' said Teddy's mother; 'he may bite the child.' 'He'll do no such thing,' said the father. 'Teddy's safer with that little beast than if he had a bloodhound to watch him.'

Early in the morning Rikki-tikki came to early breakfast in the veranda riding on Teddy's shoulder, and they gave him banana and some boiled egg; and he sat on all their laps one after the other.

Then Rikki-tikki went out into the garden to see what was to be seen. It was a large garden, only half cultivated with bushes of roses, lime and orange trees, clumps of bamboos, and thickets of high grass. Rikki-tikki licked his lips. 'That is a splendid hunting-ground,' he said and his tail grew bottle-brushy at the thought of it, and he scuttled up and down the garden, snuffing here and there till he heard very sorrowful voices in a thorn-bush. It was Darzee, the tailor-bird, and his wife. They had made a beautiful nest by pulling two big leaves together and stitching them up the edges with fibres, and had filled the hollow with cotton and downy fluff. The nest swayed to and fro, as they sat on the rim and cried.

'What is the matter ?' asked Rikki-tikki.

'We are very miserable,' said Darzee. 'One of our babies fell out of the nest yesterday and Nag ate him.'

'H'm!' said Rikki-tikki, 'that is very sad—but I am a stranger here. Who is Nag ?'

Darzee and his wife only cowered down in the nest

without answering, for from the thick grass at the foot of the bush there came a low hiss—a horrid cold sound that made Rikki-tikki jump back two clear feet. Then inch by inch out of the grass rose up the head and spread hood of Nag, the big black cobra, and he was five feet long from tongue to tail. When he had lifted one-third of himself clear of the ground, he stayed balancing to and fro, and he looked at Rikki-tikki with the wicked snake's eyes that never change their expression, whatever the snake may be thinking of.

'Who is Nag?' said he. 'I am Nag. The great God Brahma put his mark upon all our people, when the first cobra spread his hood to keep the sun off Brahma as he slept. Look, and be afraid?'

He spread out his hood more than ever, and Rikki-tikki saw the spectacle-mark on the back of it. He was afraid for the minute; but it is impossible for a mongoose to stay frightened for any length of time, and though Rikki-tikki had never met a live cobra before, his mother had fed him on dead ones, and he knew that all a grown mongoose's business in life was to fight and eat snakes. Nag knew that too and, at the bottom of his cold heart, he was afraid.

'Well,' said Rikki-tikki, and his tail began to fluff up again, 'marks or no marks, do you think it is right for you to eat fledgelings out of a nest ?'

Nag was thinking to himself, and watching the least little movement in the grass behind Rikki-tikki. He knew that mongooses in the garden meant death sooner or later for him and his family; but he wanted to get Rikki-tikki off his guard. So he dropped his head a little, and put it on one side.

'Let us talk,' he said. 'You eat eggs. Why should not I eat birds?'

'Behind you! Look behind you!' sang Darzee.

Rikki-tikki knew better than to waste time in staring. He jumped up in the air as high as he could go, and just under him whizzed by the head of Nagaina, Nag's wicked wife. She had crept up behind him as he was talking, to

make an end of him; and he heard her savage hiss as the stroke missed. He came down almost across her back, and if he had been an old mongoose he would have known that then was the time to break her back with one bite; but he was afraid of the terrible lashing return-stroke of the cobra. He bit, indeed, but did not bite long enough, and he jumped clear of the whisking tail, leaving Nagaina torn and angry.

'Wicked, wicked Darzee!' said Nag; lashing up as high as he could reach toward the nest in the thorn-bush; but Darzee had built it out of reach of snakes, and it only swayed to and fro.

Rikki-tikki felt his eyes growing red and hot (when a mongoose's eyes grow red, he is angry), and he sat back on his tail and hind legs and looked all round him, and chattered with rage. But Nag and Nagaina had disappeared into the grass. When a snake misses its stroke it never says anything or gives any sign of what it means to do next. Rikki-tikki did not care to follow them, for he did not feel sure that he could manage two snakes at once. So he trotted off to the gravel path near the house, and sat down to think. Rikki-tikki knew he was a young mongoose, and it made him all the more pleased to think that he had managed to escape a blow from behind. It gave him confidence in himself.

That night Teddy carried him off to bed, but as soon as Teddy was asleep he went off for his nightly walk round the house, and in the dark he ran up against Chuchundra, the musk-rat, creeping round by the wall. Chuchundra is a broken-hearted little beast. He whimpers and cheeps all the night, trying to make up his mind to run into the middle of the room; but he never gets there.

'Don't kill me', said Chuchundra, almost weeping. 'Rikki-tikki, don't kill me!'

'Do you think a snake-killer kills musk-rats?' said Rikki-tikki scornfully.

'Those who kill snakes get killed by snakes,' said Chuchundra more sorrowfully than ever. 'And how am I to

be sure that Nag won't mistake me for you some dark night?'

'There's not the least danger,' said Rikki-tikki; 'but Nag is in the garden, and I know you don't go there.'

'My cousin Chua, the rat, told me—' said Chuchundra, and then he stopped.

'Told you what ?'

'H'sh! Nag is everywhere, Rikki-tikki. You should have talked to Chua in the garden.'

'I didn't—so you must tell me. Quick, Chuchundra, or I'll bite you!'

Chuchundra sat down and cried till the tears rolled off his whiskers. 'I am a very poor man,' he sobbed. 'I never had spirit enough to run out into the middle of the room. H'sh! I mustn't tell you anything. Can't you *hear*, Rikki-tikki?'

Rikki-tikki listened. The house was as still as death but he thought he could just catch the faintest *scratch-scratch* in the world, —a noise as faint as that of a wasp walking on a window-pane—the dry scratch of a snake's scales on brickwork.

'That's Nag or Nagaina,' he said to himself: 'and he is crawling into the bath-room sluice. You are right, Chuchundra; I should have talked to Chua.'

He stole off to Teddy's bath-room, but there was nothing there, and then to Teddy's mother's bath-room. At the bottom of the smooth plaster wall there was a brick pulled out to make a sluice for the bath water, and as Rikki-tikki stole in by the masonry curb where the bath is put, he heard Nag and Nagaina whispering together outside in the moonlight.

'When the house is emptied of people,' said Nagaina to her husband, *'he* will have to go away, and then the garden will be our own again. Go in quietly, and remember that the big man is the first one to bite. Then come out and tell me, and we will hunt for Rikki-tikki together.'

Then Nag's head came through the sluice, and his five

feet of cold body followed it. Angry as he was Rikki-tikki was very frightened as he saw the size of the big cobra. Nag coiled himself up, raised his head, and looked into the bath-room in the dark, and Rikki could see his eyes glitter.

Nag waved to and fro, and then Rikki-tikki heard him drinking from the biggest water-jar that was used to fill the bath. 'That is good,' said the snake, 'When he comes in to bathe in the morning he will not have a stick. I shall wait here till he comes. Nagaina—do you hear me?—I shall wait here in the cool till daytime.'

There was no answer from outside, so Rikki-tikki knew Nagaina had gone away. Nag coiled himself down, coil by coil, round the bulge at the bottom of the water-jar, and Rikki-tikki stayed still as death. After an hour he began to move, muscle by muscle, towards the jar. Nag was asleep, and Rikki-tikki looked at his big back, wondering which would be the best place for a good hold. 'If I don't break his back at the first jump,' said Rikki, 'he can still fight; and if he fights—O Rikki' He looked at the thickness of the neck below the hood, but that was too much for him; and a bite near the tail would only make Nag savage.

'It must be the head,' he said at last; 'the head above the hood; and, when I am once there, I must not let go.'

Then he jumped. The head was lying a little clear of the water-jar, under the curve of it; and, as his teeth met, Rikki braced his back against the bulge of the red earthenware to hold down the head. This gave him just one second's purchase, and he made the most of it. Then he was battered to and fro as a rat is shaken by a dog—to and fro on the floor, up and down, and round in great circles, but his eyes were red and he held on as the body cart-whipped over the floor, upsetting the tin dipper and the soap-dish and the flesh-brush, and banged against the tin side of the bath. As he held he closed his jaws tighter and tighter, for he made sure he would be banged to death, and, for the honour of his family, he preferred to be

found with his teeth locked. He was dizzy, aching, and felt shaken to pieces when something went off like a thunderclap just behind him; a hot wind knocked him senseless and red fire singed his fur. The big man had been wakened by the noise and had fired both barrels of a shot-gun into Nag just behind the hood.

Rikki-tikki held on with his eyes shut, for now he was quite sure he was dead; but the head did not move, and the big man picked him up and said: 'It's the mongoose again, Alice; the little chap has saved our lives now.' Then Teddy's mother came in with a very white face, and saw what was left of Nag, and Rikki-tikki dragged himself to Teddy's bedroom and spent half the rest of the night shaking himself tenderly to find out whether he really was broken into forty pieces, as he fancied.

When morning came he was very stiff, but well pleased with his doings. 'Now I have Nagaina to settle with, and she will be worse than five Nags. Goodness ! I must go and see Darzee,' he said.

Without waiting for breakfast, Rikki-tikki ran to the thorn-bush where Darzee was singing a song of triumph at the top of his voice. The news of Nag's death was all over the garden, for the sweeper had thrown the body on the rubbish-heap.

'Oh, you stupid tuft of feathers!' said Rikki-tikki angrily. 'Is this the time to sing ?'

'Nag is dead—is dead—is dead !' sang Darzee. 'The valiant Rikki-tikki caught him by the head and held fast. The big man brought the bang-stick, and Nag fell in two pieces! He will never eat my babies again.'

'All that's true enough; but where's Nagaina?' said Rikki-tikki, looking carefully round him.

'Nagaina came to the bath-room sluice and called for Nag,' Darzee went on; 'and Nag came out on the end of a stick—the sweeper picked him up on the end of a stick and threw him upon the rubbish-heap. Let us sing about the great, the red-eyed Rikki-tikki!' and Darzee filled his

throat and sang.

'Stop singing a minute, Darzee.' said Rikki-tikki. 'Where is Nagaina ?' 'On the rubbish-heap by the stables mourning for Nag.'

'Have you ever heard where she keeps her eggs ?'

'In the melon-bed, on the end nearest the wall, where the sun strikes nearly all day. She hid them there weeks ago.'

'Darzee, if you have a grain of sense you will fly off to the stables and pretend that your wing is broken, and let Nagaina chase you away to this bush? I must get to the melon-bed, and if I went there now she'd see me.'

Darzee was a feather-brained little fellow. But his wife was a sensible bird, and she knew that cobra's eggs meant young cobras later on; so she flew off from the nest and left Darzee to keep the babies warm, and continue his song about the death of Nag.

She fluttered in front of Nagaina by the rubbish-heap, and cried out, 'Oh my wing is broken! The boy in the house threw a stone at me and broke it.' Then she fluttered more desperately than ever.

Nagaina lifted up her head and hissed, 'You warned Rikki-tikki when I would have killed him. Indeed and truly, you've chosen a bad place to be lame in.' And she moved toward Darzee's wife, slipping along over the dust.

'The boy broke it with a stone!' shrieked Darzee's wife.

'Well ! It may be some consolation to you when you're dead to know that I shall settle accounts with the boy. My husband lies on the rubbish-heap this morning, but before night the boy in the house will lie very still. What is the use of running away? I am sure to catch you. Little fool look at me!'

Darzee's wife knew better than to do *that,* for a bird who looks at a snake's eyes gets so frightened that she cannot move. Darzee's wife fluttered on, piping sorrowfully, and never leaving the ground, and Nagaina quickened her pace.

Rikki-tikki heard them going up the path from the stables, and he raced for the end of the melon-patch near the wall.

There, in the warm litter above the melons, very cunningly hidden, he found twenty-five eggs, but with whitish skins instead of shells.

'I was not a day too soon,' he said; for he could see the baby cobras curled up inside the skin, and he knew that the minute they were hatched they could each kill a man or a mongoose. He bit off the tops of the eggs as fast as he could, taking care to crush the young cobras, and turned over the litter from time to time to see whether he had missed any. At last there were only three eggs left, and Rikki-tikki began to chuckle to himself, when he heard Darzee's wife screaming:

'Rikki-tikki, I led Nagaina toward the house and she has gone into the veranda, and—oh, come quickly—she means killing!'

Rikki- tikki smashed two eggs, and tumbled backward down the melon-bed with the third egg in his mouth, and scuttled to the veranda as hard as he could put foot to the ground. Teddy and his mother and father were there at early breakfast; but Rikki-tikki saw that they were not eating anything. They sat stone-still, and their faces were white. Nagaina was coiled up on the matting by Teddy's chair, within easy striking distance of Teddy's bare leg, and she was swaying to and fro, singing a song of triumph.

'Son of the big man that killed Nag,' she hissed, 'stay still. I am not ready yet. Wait a little. Keep very still all you three! If you move I strike, and if you do not move I strike. Oh, foolish people, who killed my Nag !'

Teddy's eyes were fixed on his father, and all his father could do was to whisper, 'Sit still, Teddy. You mustn't move. Teddy, keep still.'

Then Rikki-tikki came up and cried: 'Turn round, Nagaina; turn and fight !'

'All in good time,' said she, without moving her eyes. 'I will settle my account with *you* presently. Look at your friends, Rikki-tikki. They are still and white. They are afraid. They dare not move, and if you come a step nearer

I strike.'

'Look at your eggs,' said Rikki-tikki, 'in the melon-bed near the wall. Go and look, Nagaina !'

The big snake turned half round, and saw the egg on the veranda. 'Ah-h ! Give it to me,' she said.

Rikki-tikki put his paws one on each side of the egg, and his eyes were blood red. 'What price for a snake's egg ? For a young cobra? For the last—the very last of the brood ? The ants are eating all the others down by the melon-bed.'

Nagaina spun clear round, forgetting everything for the sake of the one egg; and Rikki-tikki saw Teddy's father shoot out a big hand, catch Teddy by the shoulder, and drag him safe and out of reach of Nagaina.

'Tricked ! Tricked ! Tricked ! *Rikk-tck-tck* !' chuckled Rikki-tikki. 'The boy is safe, and it was I—I—I that caught Nag by the hood last night in the bath-room.' Then he began to jump up and down, all four feet together, his head close to the floor. 'He threw me to and fro, but he could not shake me off. He was dead before the big man blew him in two. I did it : *Rikki-tikki-tck-tck* ! Come then, Nagaina. Come and fight with me. You shall not be a widow long.'

Nagaina saw that she had lost her chance of killing Teddy, and the egg lay between Rikki-tikki's paws. 'Give me the egg, Rikki-tikki. Give me the last of my eggs, and I will go away and never come back,' she said, lowering her hood.

'Yes, you will go away, and you will never come back; for you will go to the rubbish-heap with Nag. Fight, widow ! The big man has gone for his gun ! Fight !'

Rikki-tikki was bounding all round Nagaina, keeping just out of reach of her stroke, his little eyes like hot coals. Nagaina gathered herself together, and flung out at him. Rikki-tikki jumped up and backwards. Again and again and again she struck, and each time her head came with a whack on the matting of the veranda and she gathered

herself together like a watch-spring. Then Rikki-tikki danced in a circle to get behind her, and Nagaina spun round to keep her head to his head, so that the rustle of her tail on the matting sounded like dry leaves blown along by the wind.

He had forgotten the egg. It still lay on the veranda, and Nagaina came nearer and nearer to it, till at last, while Rikki-tikki was drawing breath, she caught it in her mouth, turned to the veranda steps, and flew like an arrow down the path, with Rikki-tikki behind her. When the cobra runs for her life, she goes like a whip-lash flicked across a horse's neck. Rikki-tikki knew that he must catch her, or all the trouble would begin again. She headed straight for the long grass by the thorn-bush, and as he was running Rikki-tikki heard Darzee still singing his foolish little song of triumph. But Darzee's wife was wiser. She flew off her nest as Nagaina came along, and flapped her wings about Nagaina's head. If Darzee had helped they might have turned her; but Nagaina only lowered her hood and went on. Still, the instant's delay brought Rikki-tikki up to her and as she plunged into the rat-hole where she and Nag used to live, his little white teeth were clenched on her tail, and he went down with her—and very few mongooses, however wise and old they may be, care to follow a cobra into its hole. It was dark in the hole; and Rikki-tikki never knew when it might open out and give Nagaina room to turn and strike at him. He held on savagely, and stuck out his feet to act as brakes on the dark slope of the hot, moist earth. Then the grass by the mouth of the hole stopped waving, and Darzee said: 'It is all over with Rikki-tikki ! We must sing his death-song. Valiant Rikki-tikki is dead ! For Nagaina will surely kill him underground.'

So he sang a very mournful song that he made up on the spur of the minute, and just as he got to the most touching part the grass quivered again, and Rikki-tikki covered with dirt, dragged himself out of the hole leg by leg licking his

whiskers. Darzee stopped with a little shout. Rikki-tikki shook some of the dust out of his fur and sneezed. 'It is all over,' he said. 'The widow will never come out again.' And the red ants that live between the grass stems heard him, and began to troop down one after another to see if he had spoken the truth.

Rikki-tikki curled himself up in the grass and slept where he was—slept and slept till it was late in the afternoon, for he had done a hard day's work.

'Now,' he said, when he awoke, 'I will go back to the house. Tell the Coppersmith, Darzee, and he will tell the garden that Nagaina is dead.'

The Coppersmith is a bird who makes a noise exactly like the beating of a little hammer on a copper pot; and the reason he is always making it is because he is the town-crier to every Indian garden, and tells all the news to everybody who cares to listen. As Rikki-tikki went up the path, he heard his 'attention' notes like a tiny dinner-gong; and then the steady 'Ding-dong-tock ! Nag is dead—dong ! Nagaina is dead! Ding-dong-tock!' That set all the birds in the garden singing, and the frogs croaking, for Nag and Nagaina used to eat frogs as well as little birds.

When Rikki got to the house, that night he ate all that was given him till he could eat no more, and went to bed on Teddy's shoulder, where Teddy's mother saw him when she came to look late at night.

'He saved our lives and Teddy's life,' she said to her husband. 'Just think, he saved all our lives.'

Rikki-tikki woke up with a jump, for the mongooses are light sleepers.

'Oh, it's you,' said he. 'What are you bothering for? All the cobras are dead; and if they weren't, I'm here.'

Rikki-tikki had a right to be proud of himself; but he did not grow too proud and he kept that garden as a mongoose should keep it, with tooth and jump and spring and bite, till never a cobra dared show its head inside the walls.

Mrs Packletide's Tiger

H. H. MUNRO (SAKI) [1870-1917]

IT was Mrs. Packletide's pleasure and intention that she should shoot a tiger. Not that the lust to kill had suddenly descended on her, or that she felt that she would leave India safer and more wholesome than she had found it, with one fraction less of wild beast per million of inhabitants. The compelling motive for her sudden deviation towards the footsteps of Nimrod was the fact that Loona Bimberton had recently been carried eleven miles in an aeroplane by an Algerian aviator, and talked of nothing else; only a personally procured tiger-skin and a heavy harvest of Press photographs could successfully counter that sort of thing. Mrs. Packletide had already arranged in her mind the lunch she would give at her house in Curzon Street, ostensibly in Loona Bimberton's honour, with a tiger-skin rug occupying most of the foreground and all of the conversation. She had also already designed in her mind the tiger-claw brooch that she was going to give Loona Bimberton on her next birthday. In a world that is supposed to be chiefly swayed by hunger and by love Mrs. Packletide was an exception; her movements and motives were largely governed by dislike of Loona Bimberton.

Circumstances proved propitious. Mrs. Packletide had offered a thousand rupees for the opportunity of shooting a tiger without overmuch risk or exertion, and it so happened that a neighbouring village could boast of being the favoured rendezvous of an animal of respectable antecedents, which had been driven by the increasing infirmities of age to

abandon game-killing and confine its appetite to the smaller domestic animals. The prospect of earning the thousand rupees had stimulated the sporting and commercial instinct of the villagers; children were posted night and day on the outskirts of the local jungle to head the tiger back in the unlikely event of his attempting to roam away to fresh hunting-grounds, and the cheaper kinds of goats were left about with elaborate carelessness to keep him satisfied with his present quarters. The one great anxiety was lest he should die of old age before the date appointed for the memsahib's shoot. Mothers carrying their babies home through the jungle after the day's work in the fields hushed their singing lest they might curtail the restful sleep of the venerable herd-robber.

The great night duly arrived, moonlit and cloudless. A platform had been constructed in a comfortable and conveniently placed tree, and thereon crouched Mrs. Packletide and her paid companion, Miss Mebbin. A goat, gifted with a particularly persistent bleat, such as even a partially deaf tiger might be reasonably expected to hear on a still night, was tethered at the correct distance. With an accurately sighted rifle, the sportswoman awaited the coming of the quarry.

"I suppose we are in some danger?" said Miss Mebbin.

She was not actually nervous about the wild beast, but she had a morbid dread of performing an atom more service than she had been paid for.

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Packletide; "it's a very old tiger. It couldn't spring up here even if it wanted to."

"If it's an old tiger I think you ought to get it cheaper. A thousand rupees is a lot of money."

Louisa Mebbin adopted a protective elder-sister attitude towards money in general, irrespective of nationality or denomination. Her speculations as to the market depreciation of tiger remnants were cut short by the appearance on the scene of the animal itself. As soon as it caught sight of the tethered goat it lay flat on the earth, seemingly

less from a desire to take advantage of all available cover than for the purpose of snatching a short rest before commencing the grand attack.

"I believe it's ill," said Louisa Mebbin, loudly in Hindustani, for the benefit of the village head-man, who was in ambush in a neighbouring tree.

"Hush!" said Mrs. Packletide, and at that moment the tiger commenced ambling towards his victim.

"Now, now!" urged Miss Mebbin with some excitement; "if he doesn't touch the goat we needn't pay for it." (The bait was an extra.)

The rifle flashed out with a loud report, and the great tawny beast sprang to one side and then rolled over in the stillness of death. In a moment a crowd of excited villagers had swarmed on to the scene, and their shouting speedily carried the glad news to the village, where a thumping of tom-toms took up the chorus of triumph. And their triumph and rejoicing found a ready echo in the heart of Mrs. Packletide; already that luncheon-party in Curzon Street seemed immeasurably nearer.

It was Louisa Mebbin who drew attention to the fact that the goat was in death throes from a mortal bullet-wound, while no trace of the rifle's deadly work could be found on the tiger. Evidently the wrong animal had been hit, and the beast of prey had succumbed to heart-failure, caused by the sudden report of the rifle, accelerated by senile decay. Mrs. Packletide was pardonably annoyed at the discovery; but, at any rate, she was the possessor of a dead tiger, and the villagers, anxious for their thousand rupees, gladly connived at the fiction that she had shot the beast. And Miss Mebbin was a paid companion. Therefore did Mrs. Packletide face the cameras with a light heart, and her pictured fame reached from the pages of the Texas Weekly Snapshot to the illustrated Monday supplement of the Novoe Vremya. As for Loona Bimberton, she refused to look at an illustrated paper for weeks, and her letter of thanks for the gift of a tiger-claw brooch was a model of

repressed emotions. The luncheon-party she declined; there are limits beyond which repressed emotions become dangerous.

From Curzon Street the tiger-skin rug travelled down to the Manor House, and was duly inspected and admired by the County, and it seemed a fitting and appropriate thing when Mrs. Packletide went to the County Costume Ball in the character of Diana.

"How amused every one would be if they knew what really happened," said Louisa Mebbin a few days after the ball.

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Packletide quickly.

"How you shot the goat and frightened the tiger to death," said Miss Mebbin, with her disagreeably pleasant laugh.

"No one would believe it," said Mrs. Packletide, her face changing colour rapidly.

"Loona Bimberton would," said Miss Mebbin. Mrs. Packletide's face settled on an unbecoming shade of greenish white.

"You surely wouldn't give me away?" she asked.

"I've seen a week-end cottage near Dorking that I should rather like to buy," said Miss Mebbin with seeming irrelevance. "Six hundred and eighty, freehold. Quite a bargain, only I don't happen to have the money."

* * * * *

Louisa Mebbin's pretty week-end cottage, christened by her "Les Fauves," and gay in summer-time with its garden borders of tiger-lilies, is the wonder and admiration of her friends.

"It is a marvel how Louisa manages to do it," is the general verdict.

Mrs Packletide indulges in no more big-game shooting; "The incidental expenses are so heavy," she confides to inquiring friends.

The Flood

WALTER DE LA MARE [1873-1956]

CENTURIES of time went by, and the generations of man continually increased on the earth. They scattered over wider and wider tracts of country, venturing on into regions until then strange and untrodden. There were some who lived a life of continual roving and wandering. They pitched their tents in the wild as fancy led. Others found good pastures and dwelt there, tilling the ground and gathering together flocks of sheep and herds of cattle. Yet others reared up cities, and walled them in and fortified them against their foes. And they set up kings over them, mighty in pride and soldiery and armed with weapons of war.

They learned, too, the skill of many handicrafts and how to work in metals. They fashioned instruments of music, for dancing and feasting.

They made wine out of the grape and were merry. And the daughters of men were fair as the morning. They walked in their beauty like barbaric queens, bedecked with fine raiment and jewels of gold and coloured gems.

In these days men lived to a great age, and amassed knowledge and discovered secret arts and became practised in magic, and were wise in their own eyes.

But though there was no end to the skill and invention and curiosity of their minds, the spirit of life within them languished as if in a prison-house, and was darkened. The knowledge of what is good and what evil was theirs. They were free to make choice between them. They chose evil and not good, and refused the Lord God their love and

obedience.

Pitiless and defiant, wherever they went, greed and violence and cruelty went with them, and no man was safe. They not only did evil, but in heart and imagination hated and fought against the good. Human life had become a mockery and a snare, because of the vileness of the spirit within.

And the Lord God, looking down from the heavens upon the earth which he had created, once radiant with light and peace and innocence, and now a waste of sin and woe, repented him that he had given life to the dust. He was grieved to the heart that man had fallen to a state so dark that even the hope and desire of goodness had perished in him. And the Lord God said: 'I will do away man, whom I made out of nought, from the face of the earth, and all things that have life; for it repenteth me that I created them.'

One alone of all men living found grace in his eyes. He was faithful and blameless. Loving goodness and hating evil, he had withdrawn himself from his fellow-men and lived apart from them. The name of this man was Noah, and he had three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth.

There came a day when the Lord God warned Noah that an end was soon to come to the evil that man had brought upon the earth, and that it should be cleansed of its wickedness and corruption. And he bade Noah build an ark, or ship, directing him how in all things it should be made. As the Lord God bade him, so did Noah. He chose out and felled cypress and pine for timber, and with his three sons laboured day by day, until night came down and they went to rest, to fashion and build the ark, though as yet they knew neither its use nor its purpose. In length this ark was to be three hundred cubits—a hundred and fifty human paces from end to end. In breadth it was to be fifty cubits; and in height thirty—of such a height, that is, that the topmost branches of an oak tree would show green above its roof.

When Noah and his sons, having hewn and planed their timber, had laid the central keel and buttressed it and built up the curved ribs of the ark and roofed it with beams, they walled it all in with planks of cypress round about, shaping and leaving in it a narrow window, which skirted the whole circuit of the margin of the roof that covered it in. A great door also was made for its entering-in in the side of the ark, which could be opened and shut at need.

When this had been done and the towering outer walls or shell of the ark were sound and secure in all their joints and angles, they daubed them over with melted pitch or bitumen to make it proof against the weather and to seal all crevices and crannies there might be between its timbers in, so that no water could enter in.

That done, they built up within the ark and beneath the roof, three separate floors or storeys, with cross-pieces and planks, the lowermost in the belly or underpart of the ark, the other midway above it, and the third beneath the long, narrow window that had been cut out within the space of eighteen inches from the roof. They left openings, too, or hatchways, at fitting intervals in each of the three floors or storeys, with a ladder to each by which those within the ark would be able to ascend and descend from one to the other.

These they then divided by walls into rooms or chambers of various shapes and sizes, convenient and proportionate, and all in accordance with the plan and design made by Noah. When these were complete with their doors and passage-ways, they daubed over the whole of the inside of the ark with pitch also.

For many months Noah and his three sons toiled on in the building of the ark, pausing only to eat and for rest and sleep. They chose out only the finest trees and perfect timber for their purpose and fashioned and finished their handiwork with all the skill they could.

But the day came at length when their work was at an end. The last wooden peg had been driven home, the last inch

pitched, and all refuse had been cleansed away and removed. And lo! more gigantic in shape and bulk than any monster that had then its being in the depths of the oceans, their great ark, or ship—mastless and rudderless—lay ready. It was made, and in all things complete. Pitch-black and glistening in the splendour of the sun and high upon dry land it towered, in no way fine and delicate, but of an immeasurable stoutness and stability, and strong to withstand not only the buffetings of wind and tempest, but to ride in safety upon waters wild as those of the sea.

They stood together in its shadow, looking up and surveying it, and they rejoiced at sight of it and at the thought that their anxious toil was over. That evening they feasted with their wives and their children, and gave thanks to the Lord God; so that this day should ever remain with them in mind and be held in solemn and happy remembrance.

When Noah and his three sons had finished the building of the ark, the word of the Lord God came again to Noah. He was warned that a great flood or deluge was soon to descend upon the earth, blotting out for ever in one swift death the evil and violence and cruelty of men without pity and without remorse.

But with Noah himself the Lord God made a covenant of peace. He promised him that he, with his wife and his sons and all his household, should be saved alive when that day of judgment should come. For this the ark had been made. Of all men living Noah alone had remained just and faithful.

As in the building of the ark so in all things else that the Lord God bade him, Noah obeyed. And during the weeks that followed he himself and his three sons laboured without ceasing to prepare against the calamity that was soon to overwhelm the earth. For it was not only they themselves who were to find a place of refuge, but Noah had been bidden to assemble together two of every kind of living thing that was on the earth, beasts of the field and of the forest, birds of the air and whatsoever around them

enjoyed the breath of life.

To keep these creatures safe until the day when they should enter with them into the ark, Noah and his three sons made pens and folds, fencing them in so that no wild thing from without should enter, or captive within win free. They found caves also in the hills and rocks for beasts that are by nature wild and solitary in their habits, or secret and timid.

So day by day and week by week they gathered together two of every kind of living thing that roved around them or dwelt beneath the blue of heaven in the sweet winds and rains and dews, throughout the region of valley, plain and mountain, lying in a wide circuit around the place wherein they had built the ark. Mate with mate they brought them in, and fed them and kept them secure and in good liking, lion and lioness, leopard and leopardess, the stag and his doe, the fox and his vixen, horse and mare, bull and cow, ram and ewe, boar and sow, the wide-browed elephant and his mate, the antelope of the rocks, sheep and goat, the crafty cat, the gnawing rat, and the dark-delighting mouse. All these and countless others they assembled in the resorts that had been prepared for them, making ready for the day of the entering-in. The weather darkened; winds wailing in the vacancy of space rose up and fell again. Vast flights of birds showed themselves in the skies of daybreak and sunset. There came a restlessness and fearfulness among the wild things of the earth. They were seen prowling in places where they had never ventured before, drawing near to the dwellings of man as if for refuge, and driven away with blows and curses. The radiance even of noonday became sad and sickly, though but little cloud was to be discerned in the firmament. In the midst of night strange lamentations, as if from bodily wanderers, broke the stillness. The pitch-black ark, its timbered roof glistening in the wan light, lay heavily on ground cracked in all directions in the windy heat of the day, for the earth was stark with drought.

And the word of the Lord God came to Noah, bidding

him go into the ark and take into it all the living creatures that were to be saved alive from destruction. So Noah and his three sons made a bridge of timber of a strength that would bear the tread of the mightiest beasts then on earth. This they laid between the door of the ark and firm ground; then each according to its kind, every living creature which they had in keeping and readiness for this day was brought into the ark, and there tethered or chambered in the places set apart for them. Two by two, and mate with mate they brought them in.

The greatest beasts and those whose habit it was to rove by night and sleep by day were given their places in the lowermost storey of the ark, beneath its undermost deck. The shy and delicate were cribbed where the light could shine in on them from the window. To each was its own particular place set apart in the pens and chambers within the hive-like confines of the ark.

In the bins and chests and baskets which had been made ready and stood all in order and in place where they would be needed, Noah and his sons had laid up an abundant store of grain and hay and fodder and seed. Of all herbs and plants, too, that would retain their virtue and nourishment for many days to come. These were for the food and sustenance of the beasts and the birds and the creeping things.

When all the animals and birds, the reptiles and creeping things were safely within the ark, then Noah gathered his family together, his wife, his three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, and their wives, and their children. The last wild light of evening dyed the heavens as in awe and dread they went up into the ark. And to each was given a sleeping-place in the great inner chamber wherein they were to spend the days that were to come. And when they had one and all crossed over into the ark, the bridge of timber was flung to earth, and the massive door turned upon its staples and was shut.

A cold trumpeting wind had begun to blow, lifting into

the air dense clouds of sand and dust. It increased hour by hour, until nothing could be heard from within the ark but the sound of it streaming across the high rounded roof and wailing in every nook and cranny. Lightnings wild and luminous flared in the skies, but at first without sound of thunder. And when the tempest of wind began to lull, there fell the first drops of rain.

The rain increased in volume until it seemed to those safe in the shelter of the ark as if sky and earth had mingled together in a dreadful confusion. The deluge descended upon the ridged roof of the ark in a steady sullen roar and surged against its sides. Hour followed hour and even the huge wooden walls of the great ship trembled beneath the cataracts of the rain. And soon from its long window nought was visible but a world lost in water and lit by lightnings. And at length the ark that till then had lain upon the earth as if no force could so much as stir its enormous keel, was lifted as if by a gentle but mighty hand, swayed, came to rest again, heaved upward, and floated on the waters.

When Noah and his three sons had gone their way to and fro in every part of the great ship, carrying with them the lamps they had moulded out of clay and filled with oil and a wick, and examined it in every part and returned together and reported nothing amiss, they gave thanks to God for their salvation.

And darkness, furious, awful and distraught, drew over the flooded plain, whose encircling mountains were already veiled from view with the wrack and cloud of tempest. Shrill outcries and lamentations were borne faintly in one blast of the winds, but at last died down and were heard no more, unless from very far away. And the children were laid to rest in the sleeping-places prepared for them.

But during that first night little sleep visited those who watched over them. There were stirrings and sighings and snortings as the beasts they had in charge snuffed the fragrance of the waters of the deluge and were disquieted by the

din and tumult. They shared a narrow solitude in that chaos of water.

But as the days went by there came peace and tranquillity within the ark, and at length the humans within it grew so accustomed to the endless gushings of the rain upon roof and walls, that they were no longer troubled or dismayed, and the sound of it at last became almost unheeded.

Buoyant yet stable upon the face of the deluge, the ark floated beneath the louring skies whithersoever wind and water led, in a mist so dense no eye could discern where cloud and water met. But those within its walls, and in the safety of God, went about their daily tasks, portioning out the grain and fodder they had stored up within it, and tending the living things they had within their charge, in trust and confidence that they would be delivered at last from the danger and desolation that beset them.

For forty days and forty nights the rains continued without pause or abatement, and so obscure were the skies, that the light of dawn was hardly to be discerned when it began, or the oncoming of darkness when nightfall descended upon the deep.

The hours of sleep were divided into watches, Noah's three sons taking each his turn, so that nothing should go amiss and remain undiscovered, for each made his rounds according to the time set for him, passing from one storey to another and ensuring that all was secure.

There came a day at last when the roar of the deluge began to diminish, and the wind to fall to calm, and the rain from heaven was restrained.

There was now quiet on high above the earth. But a deep gloom still prevailed within the ark because of the prodigious canopy of cloud that obscured the whole firmament. All sounds, except the stir and callings within the wooden walls of the ark, were now hushed. And though there was movement in the clouds above amid a vast sea of light where their fleeces were smitten to silver by the sun, nothing of this could be perceived from the window of the ark. Until one morning

in his watch before dawn Shem stood peering out alone across the tumultuous waste of waters. And lo, as he looked he descried afar off a faint yet dazzling strip of silver between earth and heaven on the margin of the deep. His heart leapt within him, for he knew that it was the radiance of the rising sun, and that he was looking towards the quarter of the horizon which is the east.

He ran at once with these glad tidings to Noah, and they awakened Ham and Japheth and their mother and their wives and their children, and all rose up hastily and gathered together at the window and gazed out, their minds filled with a joy beyond all words, their eyes exulting in this first gleam of the veiled radiance of the clouded sun. There they knelt and prayed together, and gave thanks to the Lord God.

Hour by hour the light increased, and the bitter surges of the deluge sank to rest, until at last even the blue of heaven began to show. But all around the ark, as far as sight could reach, there stretched a sea of water, green and placid, though blackened here and there with ghastly wreckage. It sparkled in the sunbeams, so that human eyes unaccustomed to the glare were almost blinded as they watched. And ever and again the mighty mastless vessel heaved on the slow swell that moved across the deep, rose, and dipped again. The ocean of waters seemed to be lulling itself to sleep with long-drawn sighs.

Moreover, not only the light but the heat of the sun now began to steal its way into the confines of the ark. Through a crevice of the window the bees found out an egress and sipped the dew on the roof and the nectar of the few blossoming weeds that had found harbourage there. The birds preened their wings and broke into merry wild-hearted song, whose voices for many days had been still and mute. Their sweet-billed notes rang shrill in the stealing sunshine.

From storey to storey, pen to pen, and chamber to chamber of the ark, the beasts called the joyous news from one to the other, for happy life began to stir again within them; and the desire for freedom, for the woods and pastures,

valley and mountain, to move in their blood.

But though to all seeming the rains were now over and gone, no sign of land was anywhere detectable above the waters, nor even so far as could be discerned through the mists that veiled the horizon, did any mountain peak as yet uprear its crags. Yet morning, noon and evening the waters which had prevailed upon the earth continued to abate.

And the Lord God remembered Noah, and those who were with him in the ark. He caused a warm and gentle wind to pass over the earth, enveloping the waters. They diminished continually until at length and in all surety there showed afar off a mountain-crest jutting out above the flood into the sapphire skies, as if fashioned of crystal and alabaster.

Then Noah, considering within himself, chose from among the birds in his keeping a raven, and opening the window of the ark, he loosed it out of his hand. With one clap of its wild wings it darted out into freedom, and in the twinkling of an eye both the bird and its image reflected on the glass of the waters had fled away and vanished out of sight, never to return. For it found food in such abundance on which to glut itself in the wreckage of the flood, that it came back to the ark no more.

Noah waited for seven days, then took a dove and released her from the window of the ark. But the dove, that is a tender bird, found no rest for the sole of her foot where she could be content, for still the waters of the deluge covered the face of the earth, and she returned to the ark and fluttered at the window. So Noah put out his hand and drew the dove back into the safety of the ark.

He waited yet another seven days, then set her free again, and behold, as they stood watching at even-fall, she came again to the window of the ark, her snowy breast and plumage dyed with the rose of sunset, her round eyes gleaming. There she alighted; but now she brought with her in her bill a tender young olive leaf that she had plucked off

from its stem, and Noah knew that the waters were indeed abated and assuaged from the earth.

And when he sent her forth again, she too returned to him no more.

The ark rested at last in the hollow between the peaks of Ararat, the high mountains of Armenia, and Noah and his sons removed its timber roof from off it, and they looked down upon dry ground. And the Lord God bade Noah come forth from out of the ark, himself and his wife, his sons and their wives and children.

'Bring out with thee,' said the Lord God, 'every living thing that is with thee in the ark, beast and bird and creeping thing, that they may be fruitful upon the earth and multiply.'

Then the sons of Noah took of the timber which they had stripped from the ark and made a bridge of wood, and they thrust open the great door and let down their wooden bridge. And Noah with all his household went forth out of the ark under the blue of heaven in the burning sunshine upon the earth again, now wondrously flourishing in the sweet airs of the morning. They lifted their pale faces and breathed deep, and they walked together upon the solid earth; and the cries of the children resounded with delight; echoing against the weed-bearded sides of their great weather-worn ship.

That morning was spent in setting free the host of living things, all in order and each according to its kind, which had shared with them the safety of the ark and which they had fed and tended throughout the days of the flood.

Rejoiced they were to snuff the sweet free air of morning, and a mellay of cries and challengings rose from their throats, as they leapt and fawned and gambolled, shaking their shaggy coats, preening and sleeking themselves and marvelling in the sunlight. It was as if for the time being the peace of Eden had come upon the earth again, for during the many days of their dwelling within the ark they had become at peace one with another and with those who watched over them, and the enmity which the wickedness and cruelty

of man had brought upon the earth had lost its sharpness, and for a while their fears and doubts of him were stilled.

Then Noah built an altar to the Lord God and made sacrifice to him. And the Lord God blessed Noah and his sons and gave them the earth for their possession, and the lordship over all living things upon it for their use and care. He bade Noah and his sons go out into the world with their wives and children and seek each his own dwelling, so that their children's children should increase upon the earth and live at peace one with another, praising him who had given them life.

And as Noah and his household worshipped before the Lord, a faint mist, high in the noonday firmament, shaped itself across the blue as if it were a veil between heaven and earth, and the rays of the sun smote on the mist, and a great bow of broken light, burning with all the radiant colours that show upon the earth and in the sky and in the waters and that are reflected in every living thing, flower and insect, beast and plumed bird, spanned the peaks of Ararat, where Noah and his household were gathered together with their possessions about the empty ark. It arched the green world over; and the light of day smote fair upon their upturned faces.

And the Lord God said to Noah: 'Behold I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a token of an everlasting covenant between me and thee and all that come after thee, that never more shall there be a flood to destroy the earth where the life that I have created hath its dwelling. But after the rain shall shine the sun, and this bow that I have set in heaven shall be a sign of the covenant between the Lord God and his living creatures upon the earth, for evermore.'

The Village Well

PREM CHAND [1880-1937]

(Translated by Gurdial Mallik)

"WHAT stinking water have you brought me!" said Jokhu to Gangi as he lifted the pot to his lips. "It smells so offensively that I can't drink it and all the while my throat is getting parched."

Every day Gangi used to keep jars filled with water. The well was far off and it was very difficult to go there often. Overnight when she had fetched water from the well there was no smell in it at all. Whence came this offensive odour now? Could it be that some creature had fallen into the well and died there and its body had decomposed?

Sahu the moneylender's well was on the outskirts of the village. But who would let her go there and draw water from it? Jokhu, who had been ailing for days, began to feel very uneasy. His throat was very dry and he was almost dying of thirst. "Gangi," he called to his wife, "let me have the water you have in the house. I shall close my nostrils and drink of it a little to slake my thirst."

Gangi replied, "How will you drink that stinking water? I shall just run off to the village well and bring fresh water for you !"

Jokhu looked at her in surprise. "From where will you bring fresh water ?"

"There are two wells, one of the Thakur, the landlord, and the other of Sahu. Wouldn't he let me have even a potful of water ?"

"Don't be rash. The Brahmins will curse you. The Thakur will beat you with his long staff. And Sahu will increase your debt five-fold. You will have your bones broken to bits. Who understands the pain of the poor ? Even when we are dying nobody peeps into our house to enquire how we are faring. Could then such people let you have water from their wells?"

Gangi had no answer to give to these arguments of Jokhu. All the same she did not let him have the stinking water.

It was nine o'clock at night. The worn-out labourers had gone to bed. A few idlers were at the door of the Thakur. They were talking of their courage on the floor of the court, the days of the display of physical courage being no more: how the Thakur by bribing the Police Inspector had got scot-free in a particular case, how he had obtained a copy of a certain important document in the teeth of opposition and that, too, without paying a single pie. One must only know the tricks of the trade.

Just at that time Gangi came to the well to draw water. The light of the oil lamp was dimly reflected on the well. Gangi therefore waited for an opportune moment. But she said in her mind, "The whole village draws water from this well; why should we, the only unfortunates, be denied this privilege?"

Gangi's heart began to revolt against social restrictions and she began to think aloud, "Why are they called high-born and we low-born? Simply because they wear a thread? And yet every one of them vies with the others in cunning and craftiness. They steal, they deceive, they file false suits. Only the other day this very Thakur stole a sheep of a poor shepherd and subsequently made meat of it. And that Pandit—his house is a gambling den all the year round. And our Sahuji—he sells *ghee* adulterated with oil. They get their work done and when we ask for wages they feel so ill at ease. Then in what respect are they higher than we? Perhaps because we don't cry out from

every street-corner that we are high-born? If by chance I walk into the village, they, snakes in human form, stare at me with bloodshot eyes."

Just then the sound of some one's footsteps was heard. Gangi's heart began to beat fast. She picked up her earthen jar and the rope and hid herself behind in the dark shade of the trees, for she was afraid of those callous fellows who not long ago had beaten Mehgoo so severely that the poor fellow spat blood for a month—his only sin being that he had asked for his wages.

Two women came to the well to draw water. They were overheard talking to each other: "These men don't let us sit quiet even for a moment. They order us to do this, that, and the other thing as if we were their maid-servants hired for food and a few rupees." Then one of them said, "Stop, had I worked as hard in another's home, I could have been living in comfort. But what adds insult to injury is that our menfolk don't show any appreciation at all."

The two women went away after filling their pitchers. Gangi came out of her hiding place. The Thakur was seen going inside his house to retire. "At last," thought Gangi, "the field is clear." She went to the well with greater caution and circumspection than the prince of old who set out in search of the elixir of life. When she reached the well she felt a thrill of triumph.

She put the loop of the rope round the neck of the pitcher and let it down into the well. She looked round on all sides with eagle eyes as a soldier does while making a breach into the enemy's fort. If she were caught red-handed that moment, there would be absolutely no hope of pardon or mercy. She lifted her heart in prayer to the gods and plucked courage.

Gangi gave three or four jerks to the pitcher in the well and then drew it up with surprising swiftness. All of a sudden the door of the Thakur's house was flung wide open, and the opened door was more dreadful than the mouth of the lion agape. The rope slipped from the hands of

Gangi, the pitcher fell into the water, making a great sound. "Who is there, who is there?" shouted the Thakur and walked fast towards the well. Gangi ran away with bated breath. When she reached home she found Jokhu drinking the dirty water.

The Great Sermon Handicap

SIR P. G. WODEHOUSE [1881-1975]

'JEEVES,' I said, 'it's beastly hot
'The weather is oppressive, sir.'
'London in August,' I said, 'rather tends to give me the pip. All my pals are away, most of the theatres are shut, and they're taking up Piccadilly in large spadefuls. The world is empty and smells of burning asphalt. Shift-ho, I think, Jeeves, what ?'
'Just as you say, sir. There is a letter on the tray, sir.'
'By Jove, Jeeves, that was practically poetry. Rhymed, did you notice?' I opened the letter. 'I say, this is rather extraordinary.'
'Sir?'
'You know Twing Hall?'
'Yes, sir.'
'Well, Mr Little is there.'
'Indeed, sir?'
'Absolutely in the flesh. He's had to take another of those tutoring jobs. And what's more, Jeeves, my cousin Claude and my cousin Eustace—you remember them?'
'Very vividly, sir.'
'Well, they're down there, too, reading for some exam or other with the vicar. I used to read with him myself at one time. He's known far and wide as a pretty hot coach for those of fairly feeble intellect. Well, when I tell you he got me into Oxford, you'll gather that he's a bit of a hummer. I call this most extraordinary.'
I read the letter again. It was from Eustace. Claude

and Eustace are twins, and more or less generally admitted to be the curse of the human race.

The Vicarage,
Twing, Glos.

Dear Bertie,

Do you wish to make a bit of money? Well, come down here quick, and get in on the biggest sporting event of the season. I'll explain when I see you, but you can take it from me it's all right.

Claude and I are with a reading-party at old Heppenstall's. There are nine of us, not counting your pal Bingo Little, who is tutoring the kid up at the Hall.

Don't miss this golden opportunity, which may never occur again. Come and join us.

Yours,
Eustace.

I handed this to Jeeves. He studied it thoughtfully.
'What do you make of it? A rummy communication, what?'
'Very high-spirited young gentlemen, sir, Mr Claude and Mr Eustace. Up to some game, I should be disposed to imagine.'
'Yes. But what game, do you think?'
'It is impossible to say, sir. Did you observe that the letter continues over the page?'
'Eh, what?' I grabbed the thing. This was on the other side of the page:

SERMON HANDICAP
RUNNERS AND BETTING
PROBABLE STARTERS

Rev. Joseph Tucker (Badgwick), scratch.
Rev. Leonard Starkie (Stapleton), scratch.

Rev. Alaxander Jones (Upper Bingley), receives three minutes.
Rev. W. Dix (Little Clickton-in-the-Wold), receives five minutes.
Rev. Francis Heppenstall (Twing), receives eight minutes.
Rev. Cuthbert Dibble (Boustead Parva), receives nine minutes.
Rev. Orlo Hough (Boustead Magna), receives nine minutes.
Rev. J.J. Roberts (Fale-by-the-Water), receives ten minutes.
Rev. G. Hayward (Lower Bingley), receives twelve minutes.
Rev. James Bates (Gandle-by-the-Hill), receives fifteen minutes.

The above have arrived.

Prices: 5-2, Tucker, Starkie: 3-1, Jones: 9-2, Dix: 6-1
Heppenstall, Dibble, Hough: 100-8 any others.

It baffled me.
'Do you understand it, Jeeves?'
'No, sir.'
'Well, I think we ought to have a look into it, anyway, what?'
'Undoubtedly, sir.'
'Right-o, then. Send a wire to say we're coming, and buy two tickets on the five-ten Paddington to-morrow.'
The five-ten was late as usual, and everybody was dressing for dinner when I arrived at the Hall. It was only by getting into my evening things in record time and taking the stairs to the dining room in a couple of bounds that I managed to dead-heat with the soup. I slid into a vacant chair, and found that I was sitting next to old Lord Wickhammersley's youngest daughter, Cynthia.
'Oh, hallo, old thing,' I said.
Great pals we've always been. In fact, there was a time when I had an idea I was in love with Cynthia.
'Well, Bertie, so you've arrived?'
I took a look round the table, and spotted young Bingo.
'Ah, there he is,' I said. 'There's the old egg.'
'There's who?'
'Young Bingo Little. Great pal of mine. He's tutoring

your brother, you know.'
'Good gracious! Is he a friend of yours?'
'Rather ! Known him all my life.'
'Then tell me, Bertie, is he at all weak in the head?'
'Weak in the head ?'
'I don't mean simply because he is a friend of yours. But he's so strange in his manner.'
'How do you mean?'
'Well, he keeps looking at me so oddly.'
'Oddly? How? Give an imitation.'
'I can't in front of all these people.'
'Yes, you can. I'll hold my napkin up.'
'All right, then. Quick. There !'
Considering that she had only about a second and a half to do it, I must say it was a jolly fine exhibition. She opened her mouth and her eyes pretty wide and let her jaw drop sideways, and managed to look so like a dyspeptic calf that I recognised the symptoms immediately.
'Oh, that's all right,' I said. 'No need to be alarmed. He's simply in love with you.'
'In love with me? Don't be absurd.'
'My dear old thing, you don't know Bingo. He can fall in love with anybody.'
'Thank you !'
'Oh, I didn't mean it that way, you know. I don't wonder at his taking to you. Why, I was in love with you myself once.'

* * * * *

Bright and early next morning, as I lay in bed blinking at the sunlight on the dressing-table and wondering when Jeeves was going to show up with the cup of tea, a heavy weight descended on my toes, and the voice of young Bingo polluted the air. The blighter had apparently risen with the lark.

'Leave me,' I said. 'I would be alone. I can't see anybody till I've had my tea.'

'When Cynthia smiles,' said young Bingo, 'the skies are blue; the world takes on a roseate hue; birds in the garden trill and sing, and Joy is king of everything, when Cynthia smiles.' He coughed, changing gears. 'When Cynthia frowns.....'

'What the devil are you talking about?'

'I'm reading you my poem. The one I wrote to Cynthia last night. I'll go on, shall I?'

'No !'

'No ?'

'No. I haven't had my tea.'

At this moment Jeeves came in with the good old beverage, and I sprang on it with a glad cry. After a couple of sips things looked a bit brighter. Even young Bingo didn't offend the eye to quite such an extent. By the time I had finished the first cup I was a new man, when the door burst open and in blew Claude and Eustace. One of the things which discourage me about rural life is the frightful earliness with which events begin to break loose. I've stayed at places in the country where they've jerked me out of the dreamless at about six-thirty to go for a jolly swim in the lake. At Twing, thank Heaven, they knew me, and let me breakfast in bed.

The twins seemed pleased to see me.

'Good old Bertie !' said Claude.

'Stout fellow!' said Eustace. 'The Rev. told us that you had arrived I thought that letter of mine would fetch you.'

'You can always bank on Bertie,' said Claude. 'A sportsman to the finger-tips.' He pinched the last slice of thin bread-and-butter and Eustace poured himself out a cup of tea.

'It's like this, Bertie,' said Eustace, settling down cosily. 'As I told you in my letter, there are nine of us marooned in this desert spot, reading with old Heppenstall. Well, of course, nothing is jollier than sweating up the Classics

when it's a hundred in the shade, but there does come a time when you begin to feel the need of a little relaxation and, by Jove, there are absolutely no facilities for relaxation in this place whatever. And then Steggles got this idea. Steggles is one of our reading party, and between ourselves, rather a worm as a general thing. Still, you have to give him credit for getting this idea.'

'What idea?'

'Well, you know how many parsons there are around here. There are about a dozen hamlets within a radius of six miles, and each hamlet has a church and each church has a parson and each parson preaches a sermon every Sunday. To-morrow—Sunday the twenty-third—we're running off the great Sermon Handicap. Steggles is making the book. Each parson is to be clocked by a reliable steward of the course, and the one that preaches the longest sermon wins. Did you study the race card I sent you ?'

'I couldn't understand what it was all about.'

'Why, you chump, it gives the handicaps and the current odds on each starter. I've got another one here, in case you've lost yours. Take a careful look at it. It gives you the thing in a nutshell. Jeeves, old son, do you want a sporting flutter?'

'Sir?' said Jeeves, who had just meandered in with my breakfast.

Claude explained the scheme. Amazing, the way Jeeves grasped it right off. But he merely smiled in a paternal sort of way.

'Thank you, sir, I think not.'

'Well, you're with us, Bertie, aren't you?' said Claude, sneaking a roll and a slice of bacon. 'Have you studied that card? Well, tell me, does anything strike you about it?'

Of course, it did. It had struck me the moment I looked at it.

'Why, it's a sitter for old Heppenstall,' I said. 'He's got the event sewed up in a parcel. There isn't a parson in

the land who could give him eight minutes. Your pal Steggles must be an ass, giving him a handicap like that. Why, in the days when I was with him, old Heppenstall never used to preach under half an hour, and there was a sermon of his on Brotherly Love which lasted forty-five minutes if it lasted a second. Has he lost his vim lately, or what is it?'

'Not a bit of it,' said Eustace. 'Tell him what happened, Claude.'

'Why,' said Claude, 'the first Sunday we were here, we all went to Twing Church, and old Heppenstall preached a sermon that was well under twenty minutes. This is what happened. Steggles didn't notice it, and the Rev. didn't notice it himself, but Eustace and I both spotted that he dropped a chunk of at least half a dozen pages out of his sermon case as he was walking up to the pulpit. He sort of flickered when he got to the gap in the manuscript, but carried on all right, and Steggles went away with the impression that twenty minutes or a bit under was his usual form. The next Sunday we heard Tucker and Starkie, and they both went well over the thirty-five minutes, so Steggles arranged the handicapping as you see on the card. You must come into this, Bertie. You see, the trouble is that I haven't a bean, and Eustace hasn't a bean, and Bingo Little hasn't a bean, so you'll have to finance the syndicate. Don't weaken ! It's just putting money in all our pockets. Well, we'll have to be getting back now. Think the thing over, and phone me later in the day. And, if you let us down, Bertie, may a cousin's curse—Come on, Claude, old thing.'

The more I studied the scheme, the better it looked.

'How about it, Jeeves?' I said.

Jeeves smiled gently, and drifted out.

'Jeeves has no sporting blood,' said Bingo.

'Well, I have. I'm coming into this. Claude's quite right. It's like finding money by the wayside.'

'Good man,' said Bingo. 'Now I can see daylight. I'll be in a position to go to my uncle and beard him in his lair.

He's quite a bit of a snob, you know, and when he hears that I'm going to marry a daughter of an earl

'I say, old man,' I couldn't help saying, 'aren't you looking ahead rather far?'

'Oh, that's all right. It's true nothing's actually settled yet, but she practically told me the other day she was fond of me.'

'What !'

'Well, she said that the sort of man she liked was the self-reliant, manly man with strength, good looks, character, ambition, and initiative.'

'Leave me laddie,' I said. 'Leave me to my fried egg.'

Directly I got up I went to the phone, snatched Eustace away from his morning's work, and instructed him to put a tenner on the Twing flier at current odds for each of the syndicate; and after lunch Eustace rang me up to say that he had done business at a snappy seven-to-one, the odds having lengthened owing to a rumour in knowledgeable circles that the Rev. was subject to hay-fever and was taking big chances strolling in the paddock behind the Vicarage in the early mornings. And it was dashed lucky, I thought next day, that we had managed to get the money on in time, for on the Sunday morning old Heppenstall fairly took the bit between his teeth, and gave us thirty-six solid minutes on Certain Popular Superstitions. I was sitting next to Steggles in the pew, and I saw him blanch visibly. He was a little rat-faced fellow, with shifty eyes and a suspicious nature. The first thing he did when we emerged into the open air was to announce formally, that anyone who fancied the Rev. could now be accommodated at fifteen-to-eight on. This ruinous price checked the punters at once, and there was little money in sight. And so matters stood till just after lunch on Tuesday afternoon, when, as I was strolling up and down in front of the house with a cigarette, Claude and Eustace came bursting up the drive on bicycles, dripping with momentous news.

'Bertie,' said Claude deeply agitated, 'unless we take

immediate action and do a bit of quick thinking, we are in the cart.'

'What's the matter ?'

'G. Hayward's the matter,' said Eustace morosely. 'The Lower Bingley Starter.'

'We never even considered him,' said Claude. 'Somehow or other he got overlooked. It's always the way. Steggles overlooked him. We all overlooked him. But Eustace and I happened by the merest fluke to be riding through Lower Bingley this morning, and there was a wedding on at the church, and it suddenly struck us that it wouldn't be a bad move to get a line on G. Hayward's form, in case he might be a dark horse.'

'And it was jolly lucky we did,' said Eustace. 'He delivered an address of twenty-six minutes by Claude's stop watch. At a village wedding, mind you ! What'll he do when he really extends himself ?'

'There's only one thing to be done, Bertie,' said Claude. 'You must spring some more funds, so that we can hedge on Hayward and save ourselves.'

'But——'

'Well, it's the only way out.'

'But I say, you know, I hate the idea of all that money we put on Heppenstall being chucked away.'

'What else can you suggest? You don't suppose the Rev. can give this absolute marvel a handicap and win, do you?'

'I've got it,' I said.

'What ?'

'I see a way by which we can make it safe for our nominee. I'll pop over this afternoon and ask him as a personal favour to preach that sermon of his on Brotherly Love on Sunday.'

'It's a scheme,' said Claude.

'A jolly brainy scheme,' said Eustace. 'I didn't think you had it in you, Bertie.'

'But even so,' said Claude, 'fizzer as that sermon no

doubt is, will it be good enough in the face of a four minute handicap?'

'Rather !' I said. 'When I told you it lasted forty-five minutes, I was probably understanding it. I should call it—from my recollection of the thing—nearer fifty.'

'Then carry on,' said Claude.

I toddled over in the evening and fixed the thing up. Old Heppenstall was most decent about the whole affair. He seemed pleased and touched that I should have remembered the sermon all these years, and said he had once or twice had an idea of preaching it again, only it had seemed to him, on reflection, that it was perhaps a trifle long.

'And in these restless times, my dear Wooster,' he said, 'I fear that brevity in the pulpit is becoming more and more desired. I have had many arguments on the subject with my nephew, young Bates, who is taking my old friend Spettigue's place over at Gandle-by-the-Hill. His view is that a sermon nowadays should be a brisk, straight-from-the-shoulder address, never lasting more than ten or twelve minutes.'

'Long ?' I said. 'Why, you don't call that Brotherly Love sermon of yours long, do you ?'

'It takes fully fifty minutes to deliver.'

'Surely not?'

'Your incredulity, my dear Wooster, is extremely flattering—far more flattering, of course, than I deserve. Nevertheless, the facts are as I have stated. You are sure that I would not be well advised to make certain excisions and eliminations? You do not think it would be a good thing to cut, or prune?'

'Don't touch a word of it, or you'll spoil the whole thing,' I said earnestly.

'I am delighted to hear you say so, and I shall preach the sermon without fail next Sunday morning.'

I'd hardly finished my breakfast on the Saturday morning when Jeeves came to my bedside to say that Eustace wanted me on the telephone.

'Good Lord, Jeeves, what's the matter, do you think?'

I'm bound to say I was beginning to get a bit jumpy by this time.

'Do you know what I think, Jeeves? Something's gone wrong with the favourite.'

'Which is the favourite, sir?'

'Mr Heppenstall. He's gone to odds on. He was intending to preach a sermon on Brotherly Love which would have brought him home by lengths.'

I shoved on a dressing-gown, and flew downstairs like a mighty, rushing wind. The moment I heard Eustace's voice I knew we were for it. It had a croak of agony in it.

'Bertie?'

'Here I am.'

'We're sunk. The favourite's blown up.'

'No!'

'Yes. Coughing in his stable all last night.'

'What!'

'Absolutely! Hay-fever. The doctor is in with him now, and its only a question of minutes before he's officially scratched. That means the curate will show up at the post instead, and he's no good at all. What shall we do?'

I had to grapple with the thing for a moment in silence.

'Eustace?'

'Hallo?'

'What can you get on G. Hayward?'

'Only four-to-one now. I think there's been a leak, and Steggles has heard something. The odds shortened late last night in a significant manner!'

'Well, four-to-one will clear us. Put another fiver all round on G. Hayward for the syndicate. That'll bring us out on the right side of the ledger.'

'If he wins.'

'What do you mean? I thought you considered him a cert., bar Heppenstall.'

'I'm beginning to wonder,' said Eustace gloomily, 'if there's such a thing as a cert. in the world, I'm told the

Rev. Joseph Tucker did an extraordinarily fine trial gallop at a mothers' meeting yesterday. However, it seems our only chance. So long.'

Not being one of the official stewards I had my choice of churches next morning, and naturally I didn't hesitate. The only drawback to going to Lower Bingley was that it was ten miles away, which meant an early start, but I borrowed a bicycle from one of the grooms and toiled off. I had only Eustace's word for it that G. Hayward was such a stayer, and it might have been that he had showed too flattering form at that wedding; but any misgivings I may have had disappeared the moment he got into the pulpit. He went off from the start with a nice easy action, pausing and clearing his throat at the end of each sentence, and it wasn't five minutes before I realised that here was the winner. His habit of stopping dead and looking round the church at intervals was worth minutes to us, and in the home stretch we gained no little advantage owing to his dropping his pince-nez and having to grope for them. At the twenty minute mark he had merely settled down. Twenty-five minutes saw him going strong. And when he finally finished with a burst the clock showed thirty-five minutes fourteen seconds. With the handicap which he had been given, this seemed to make the event easy for him, and it was with much good-will to all men that I hopped on to the old bike and started back to the Hall for lunch.

Bingo was talking on the phone when I arrived.

'Fine! Splendid!' he was saying. 'Eh? Oh, we needn't worry about him. Right-o, I'll tell Bertie.' He hung up the receiver and caught sight of me. 'Oh, hallo, Bertie; I was just talking to Eustace. It's all right, old man. The report from Lower Bingley has just got in. G. Hayward romps home.'

'I knew he would' 'I've just come from there.'

'Oh, were you there? I went to Badgwick. Tucker ran a splendid race, but the handicap was too much for him. Starkie had a sore throat and was nowhere. Roberts, of

Fale-by-the-Water, ran third. Good old G. Hayward!' said Bingo affectionately, and we strolled out on to the terrace.

'Are all the returns in, then?' I asked.

'All except Gandle-by-the-Hill. But we needn't worry about Bates. He never had a chance. By the way, poor old Jeeves loses his tenner. Silly ass!'

'Jeeves? how do you mean?'

'He came to me this morning, just after you had left, and asked me to put a tenner on Bates for him. I told him he was a chump and begged him not to throw his money away, but he would do it.'

'I beg your pardon, sir. This note arrived for you just after you had left the house this morning.'

Jeeves had materialised from nowhere, and was standing at my elbow.

'Eh? What? Note?'

'The Reverend Mr Heppenstall's butler brought it over from the Vicarage, sir. It came too late to be delivered to you at the moment.'

Young Bingo was talking to Jeeves like a father on the subject of betting against the form-book. The yell I gave made him bite his tongue in the middle of a sentence.

'What the dickens is the matter?' he asked.

'We're dished. Listen to this!'

I read him the note.

The Vicarage,
Twing, Glos.

My dear Wooster,

As you may have heard, circumstances over which I have no control will prevent my preaching the sermon on Brotherly Love for which you made such a flattering request. I am unwilling, however, that you shall be disappointed, so, if you will attend divine service at Gandle-by-the-Hill this morning, you will hear my sermon preached by young Bates,

my nephew. I have lent him the manuscript at his urgent desire, for, between ourselves, there are wheels within wheels. My nephew is one of the candidates for the headmastership of a well-known public school, and the choice has narrowed down between him and one rival.

Late yesterday evening James received private information that the head of the Board of Governors of the school proposed to sit under him this Sunday in order to judge the merits of his preaching, a most important item in swaying the Board's choice. I acceded to his plea that I lend him my sermon on Brotherly Love, of which, like you, he apparently retains a vivid recollection. It would have been too late for him to compose a sermon of suitable length in place of the brief address which—mistakenly in my opinion—he had designed to deliver to his rustic flock, and I wished to help the boy.

Trusting that his preaching the sermon will supply you with as pleasant memories as you say you have of mine, I remain,

Cordially yours,
F. Heppenstall.

P.S. The hay-fever has rendered my eyes unpleasantly week for the time being, so I am dictating this letter to my butler, Brookfield who will convey it to you.

I don't know when I have experienced a more massive silence than the one that followed my reading of this cheery epistle. Young Bingo gulped once or twice, and practically every known emotion came and went on his face. Jeeves coughed one soft, low, gentle cough like a sheep with a blade of grass stuck in its throat, and then stood gazing serenely at the landscape. Finally young Bingo spoke.

'So you had inside information, dash it!'

'Why, yes, sir,' said Jeeves, 'Brookfield happened to mention the contents of the note to me when he brought it.

We are old friends.'

Bingo registered grief, anguish, rage, despair, and resentment. 'Well, all I can say,' he cried, 'is that it's a bit thick!' Preaching another man's sermon! Do you call that honest? Do you call that playing the game?'

'Well, my dear old thing,' I said, 'be fair. It's quite within the rules. Clergymen do it all the time. They aren't expected always to make up the sermons they preach.'

Jeeves coughed again, and fixed me with an expressionless eye.

'And in the present case, sir, if I may be permitted to take the liberty of making observation, I think we should make allowances. We should remember that the securing of the headmastership meant everything to the young couple.'

'Young couple! What young couple?'

'The Reverend James Bates, sir, and Lady Cynthia. I am informed by her ladyship's maid that they have been engaged to be married some weeks—provisionally, so to speak; and his lordship made his consent conditional on Mr Bates securing a really important and remunerative position.'

Young Bingo turned a light green.

'Engaged to be married!'

'Yes, sir.'

There was a silence.

'I think I'll go for a walk,' said Bingo

'But, my dear old thing,' I said, 'it's just lunch time. The gong will be going any minute now.'

'I don't want any lunch!' said Bingo.

Going Into Exile

LIAM O'FLAHERTY [1897—]

PARTICK FEENEY's cabin was crowded with people. In the large kitchen men, women, and children lined the walls, three deep in places, sitting on forms, chairs, stools, and on one another's knees. On the cement floor three couples were dancing a jig and raising a quantity of dust, which was, however, soon sucked up the chimney by the huge turf fire that blazed on the hearth. The only clear space in the kitchen was the corner to the left of the fireplace, where Pat Mullaney sat on a yellow chair, with his right ankle resting on his left knee, a spotted red handkerchief on his head that reeked with perspiration, and his red face contorting as he played a tattered old accordion. One door was shut and the tins hanging on it gleamed in the firelight. The opposite door was open and over the heads of the small boys that crowded in it and outside it, peering in at the dancing couples in the kitchen, a starry June sky was visible and, beneath the sky, shadowy grey crags and misty, whitish fields lay motionless, still and sombre. There was a deep, calm silence outside the cabin and within the cabin, in spite of the music and dancing in the kitchen and the singing in the little room to the left, where Patrick Feeney's eldest son Michael sat on the bed with three other young men, there was a haunting melancholy in the air.

The people were dancing, laughing and singing with a certain forced and boisterous gaiety that failed to hide from them the real cause of their being there, dancing, singing and laughing. For the dance was on account of Patrick

Feeney's two children, Mary and Michael, who were going to the United States on the following morning.

Feeney himself, a black-bearded, red-faced, middle-aged peasant, with white ivory buttons on his blue frieze* shirt and his hands stuck in his leather waist belt, wandered restlessly about the kitchen, urging the people to sing and dance, while his mind was in agony all the time, thinking that on the following day he would lose his two eldest children, never to see them again perhaps. He kept talking to everybody about amusing things, shouted at the dancers and behaved in a boisterous and abandoned manner. But every now and then he had to leave the kitchen, under the pretence of going to the pigsty to look at a young pig that was supposed to be ill. He would stand, however, upright against his gable and look gloomily at some star or other, while his mind struggled with vague and peculiar ideas that wandered about in it. He could make nothing at all of his thoughts, but a lump always came up his throat, and he shivered, although the night was warm.

Then he would sigh and say with a contraction of his neck: 'Oh, it's a queer world this and no doubt about it. So it is.' Then he would go back to the cabin again and begin to urge on the dance, laughing, shouting and stamping on the floor.

Towards dawn, when the floor was crowded with couples, arranged in fours, stamping on the floor and going to and fro, dancing the 'Walls of Limerick', Feeney was going out to the gable when his son Michael followed him out. The two of them walked side by side about the yard over the grey sea pebbles that had been strewn there the previous day. They walked in silence and yawned without need, pretending to be taking the air. But each of them was very excited. Michael was taller than his father and not so thickly built, but the shabby blue serge suit that he had bought for going to America was too narrow for his broad shoulders and the

*a course woollen cloth

coat was too wide around the waist. He moved clumsily in it and his hands appeared altogether too bony and big and red, and he didn't know what to do with them. During his twenty-one years of life he had never worn anything other than the homespun clothes of Inverara, and the shop-made clothes appeared as strange to him and as uncomfortable as a dress suit worn by a man working in a sewer. His face was flushed a bright red and his blue eyes shone with excitement. Now and again he wiped the perspiration from his forehead with the lining of his grey tweed cap.

At last Patrick Feeney reached his usual position at the gable end. He halted, balanced himself on his heels with his hands in his waist belt, coughed and said, 'It's going to be a warm day.' The son came up beside him, folded his arms and leaned his right shoulder against the gable.

'It was kind of Uncle Ned to lend the money for the dance, father,' he said. 'I'd hate to think that we'd have to go without something or other, just the same as everybody else has. I'll send you that money the very first money I earn, father...even before I pay Aunt Mary for my passage money. I should have all that money paid off in four months, and then I'll have some more money to send you by Christmas.'

And Michael felt very strong and manly recounting what he was going to do when he got to Boston, Massachusetts. He told himself that with his great strength he would earn a great deal of money. Conscious of his youth and his strength and lusting for adventurous life, for the moment he forgot the ache in his heart that the thought of leaving his father inspired in him.

The father was silent for some time. He was looking at the sky with his lower lip hanging, thinking of nothing. At last he sighed as a memory struck him. 'What is it?' said the son. 'Don't weaken, for God's sake. You will only make it hard for me.' 'Fooh!' said the father suddenly with pretended gruffness. 'Who is weakening? I'm afraid that your new clothes make you impudent.' Then he was

silent for a moment and continued in a low voice: 'I was thinking of that potato field you sowed alone last spring the time I had the influenza. I never set eyes on the man that could do it better. It's a cruel world that takes you away from the land that God made you for.'

'Oh, what are you talking about, father?' said Michael irritably. 'Sure what did anybody ever get out of the land but poverty and hard work and potatoes and salt?'

'Ah yes,' said the father with a sigh, 'but it's your own, the land, and over there'—he waved his hand at the western sky—'you'll be giving your sweat to some other man's land, or what's equal to it.'

'Indeed,' muttered Michael, looking at the ground with a melancholy expression in his eyes, 'it's poor encouragement you are giving me.'

They stood in silence fully five minutes. Each hungered to embrace the other, to cry, to beat the air, to scream with excess of sorrow. But they stood silent and sombre, like nature about them, hugging their woe. Then they went back to the cabin. Michael went into the little room to the left of the kitchen, to the three young men who fished in the same curragh* with him and were his bosom friends. The father walked into the large bedroom to the right of the kitchen.

The large bedroom was also crowded with people. A large table was laid for tea in the centre of the room and about a dozen young men were sitting at it, drinking tea and eating buttered raisin cake. Mrs. Feeney was bustling about the table, serving the food and urging them to eat. She was assisted by her two younger daughters and by another woman, a relative of her own. Her eldest daughter Mary, who was going to the United States that day, was sitting on the edge of the bed with several other young women. The bed was a large four poster bed with a deal canopy over it, painted red, and the young women were huddled together

*a boat

on it. So that there must have been about a dozen of them there. They were Mary Feeney's particular friends, and they stayed with her in that uncomfortable position just to show how much they liked her. It was a custom.

Mary herself sat on the edge of the bed with her legs dangling. She was a pretty, dark-haired girl of nineteen, with dimpled, plump, red cheeks and ruminative brown eyes that seemed to cause little wrinkles to come and go in her little low forehead. Her nose was soft and small and rounded. Her mouth was small and the lips were red and open. Beneath her white blouse that was frilled at the neck and her navy blue skirt that outlined her limbs as she sat on the edge of the bed, her body was plump, soft, well-moulded and in some manner exuded a feeling of freshness and innocence. So that she seemed to have been born to be fondled and admired in luxurious surroundings instead of having been born a peasant's daughter, who had to go to the United States that day to work as a servant or may be in a factory.

And as she sat on the edge of the bed crushing her little handkerchief between her palms, she kept thinking feverishly of the United States, at one moment with fear and loathing, at the next with desire and longing. Unlike her brother she did not think of the work she was going to do or the money that she was going to earn. Other things troubled her, things of which she was half ashamed, half afraid, thoughts of love and of foreign men and of clothes and of houses where there were more than three rooms and where people ate meat every day. She was fond of life, and several young men among the local 'gentry had admired her in Inverara. But....

She happened to look up and she caught her father's eyes as he stood silently by the window with his hands stuck in his waist belt. His eyes rested on hers for a moment and then he dropped them without smiling, and with his lips compressed he walked down into the kitchen. She shuddered slightly. She was a little afraid of her father, although

she knew that he loved her very much and he was very kind to her. But the winter before he had whipped her with a dried willow rod, when he caught her one evening behind Tim Hernon's cabin after nightfall, with Tim Hernon's son Bartly's arms around her waist and he kissing her. Ever since, she always shivered slightly when her father touched her or spoke to her.

'Oho!' said an old peasant who sat at the table with a saucer full of tea in his hand and his grey flannel shirt open at his thin, hairy, wrinkled neck. 'Oho! indeed, but it's a disgrace to the island of Inverara to let such a beautiful woman as your daughter go away, Mrs. Feeney. If I were a young man, I'll be flayed alive if I'd let her go.'

There was a laugh and some of the women on the bed said: 'Bad cess to you, Patsy Coyne, if you haven't too much impudence, it's a caution.' But the laugh soon died. The young men sitting at the table felt embarrassed and kept looking at one another sheepishly, as if each tried to find out if the others were in love with Mary Feeney.

'Oh, well, God is good,' said Mrs. Feeney, as she wiped her lips with the tip of her bright, clean, check apron. 'What will be must be, and sure there is hope from the sea, but there is no hope from the grave. It is sad and the poor have to suffer, but...' Mrs. Feeney stopped suddenly, aware that all these platitudes meant nothing whatsoever. Like her husband she was unable to think intelligently about her two children going away. Whenever the reality of their going away, may be for ever, three thousand miles into a vast unknown world, came before her mind, it seemed that a thin bar of some hard metal thrust itself forward from her brain and rested behind the wall of her forehead. So that almost immediately she became stupidly conscious of the pain caused by the imaginary bar of metal and she forgot the dread prospect of her children going away. But her mind grappled with the things about her busily and efficiently, with the preparation of food, with the entertaining of her guests, with the numerous little things that have to be done in

a house where there is a party and which only a woman can do properly. These little things, in a manner, saved her, for the moment at least, from bursting into tears whenever she looked at her daughter and whenever she thought of her son, whom she loved most of all her children, because perhaps she nearly died giving birth to him and he had been very delicate until he was twelve years old. So she laughed down in her breast a funny laugh she had that made her heave where her check apron rose out from the waist band in a deep curve. 'A person begins to talk,' she said with a shrug of her shoulders sideways, 'and then a person says foolish things.'

'That's true,' said the old peasant, noisily pouring more tea from his cup to his saucer.

But Mary knew by her mother laughing that way that she was very near being hysterical. She always laughed that way before she had one of her fits of hysterics. And Mary's heart stopped beating suddenly and then began again at an awful rate as her eyes became acutely conscious of her mother's body, the rotund, short body with the wonderful mass of fair hair growing grey at the temples and the fair face with the soft liquid brown eyes, that grew hard and piercing for a moment as they looked at a thing and then grew soft and liquid again, and the thin-lipped small mouth, and the tremor that always came in the corner of the mouth with love, when she looked at her children. Mary became acutely conscious of all these little points, as well as of the little black spot that was on her left breast below the nipple and the swelling that came now and again in her legs and caused her to have hysterics and would one day cause her death. And she was stricken with horror at the thought of leaving her mother and at the selfishness of her thoughts. She had never been prone to thinking of anything important but now, somehow for a moment, she had a glimpse of her mother's life that made her shiver and hate herself as a cruel, heartless, lazy, selfish wretch. Her mother's life loomed up before her eyes, a life of continual misery and suffering,

hard work, birth pangs, sickness and again hard work and hunger and anxiety. It loomed up and then it fled again, a little mist came before her eyes and she jumped down from the bed, with the jaunty twirl of her head that was her habit when she set her body in motion.

'Sit down for a while, mother,' she whispered, toying with one of the black ivory buttons on her mother's brown bodice. 'I'll look after the table.' 'No, no,' murmured the mother with a shake of her whole body, 'I'm not a bit tired. Sit down, my treasure. You have a long way to travel today.'

And Mary sighed and went back to the bed again.

At last somebody said: 'It's broad daylight.' And immediately everybody looked out and said: 'So it is, and may God be praised.' The change from the starry night to the grey, sharp dawn was hard to notice until it had arrived. People looked out and saw the morning light sneaking over the crags silently, along the ground, pushing the mist banks upwards. The stars were growing dim. A long way off invisible sparrows were chirping in their ivied perch in some distant hill or other. Another day had arrived and even as the people looked at it, yawned and began to search for their hats, caps and shawls preparing to go home, the day grew and spread its light and made things move and give voice. Cocks crew, blackbirds carolled, a dog let loose from a cabin by an early riser chased madly after an imaginary robber, barking as if his tail were on fire. The people said good-bye and began to stream forth from Feeney's cabin. They were going to their homes to see to the morning's work before going to Kilmurrage to see the emigrants off on the steamer to the mainland. Soon the cabin was empty except for the family.

All the family gathered into the kitchen and stood about for some minutes talking sleepily of the dance and of the people who had been present. Mrs. Feeney tried to persuade everybody to go to bed, but everybody refused. It was four o'clock and Michael and Mary would have to

set out for Kilmurrage at nine. So tea was made and they all sat about for an hour drinking it and eating raisin cake and talking. They only talked of the dance and of the people who had been present.

There were eight of them there, the father and mother and six children. The youngest child was Thomas, a thin boy of twelve, whose lungs made a singing sound every time he breathed. The next was Bridget, a girl of fourteen, with dancing eyes and a habit of shaking her short golden curls every now and then for no apparent reason. Then there were the twins, Julia and Margaret, quiet, rather stupid flat-faced girls of sixteen. Both their upper front teeth protruded slightly and they were both great workers and very obedient to their mother. They were all sitting at the table, having just finished a third large pot of tea, when suddenly the mother hastily gulped down the remainder of the tea in her cup, dropped the cup with a clatter to her saucer and sobbed once through her nose.

'Now mother,' said Michael sternly, 'what's the good of this work?'

'No, you are right, my pulse*,' she replied quietly. 'Only I was just thinking how nice it is to sit here surrounded by all my children, all my little birds in my nest, and then two of them going to fly away made me sad.' And she laughed, pretending to treat it as a foolish joke.

'Oh, that be damned for a story,' said the father, wiping his mouth on his sleeve; 'there's work to be done. You Julia, go and get the horse. Margaret, you milk the cow and see that you give enough milk to the calf this morning.' And he ordered everybody about as if it were an ordinary day of work.

But Michael and Mary had nothing to do and they sat about miserably conscious that they had cut adrift from the routine of their home life. They no longer had any place in it. In a few hours they would be homeless

*heart beat

wanderers. Now that they were cut adrift from it, the poverty and sordidness of their home life appeared to them under the aspect of comfort and plenty.

So the morning passed until breakfast time at seven o'clock. The morning's work was finished and the family was gathered together again. The meal passed in a dead silence. Drowsy after the sleepless night and conscious that the parting would come in a few hours, nobody wanted to talk. Everybody had an egg for breakfast in honour of the occasion. Mrs. Feeney, after her usual habit, tried to give her egg first to Michael, then to Mary, and as each refused it, she ate a little herself and gave the remainder to little Thomas who had the singing in his chest. Then the breakfast was cleared away. The father went to put the creels* on the mare so as to take the luggage into Kilmurrage. Michael and Mary got the luggage ready and began to get dressed. The mother and the other children tidied up the house. People from the village began to come into the kitchen, as was customary, in order to accompany the emigrants from their home to Kilmurrage.

At last everything was ready. Mrs. Feeney had exhausted all excuses for moving about, engaged on trivial tasks. She had to go into the big bedroom where Mary was putting on her new hat. The mother sat on a chair by the window, her face contorting on account of the flood of tears she was keeping back. Michael moved about the room uneasily, his two hands knotting a big red handkerchief behind his back. Mary twisted about in front of the mirror that hung over the black wooden mantelpiece. She was spending a long time with the hat. It was the first one she had ever worn, but it fitted her beautifully, and it was in excellent taste. It was given to her by the schoolmistress, who was very fond of her, and she herself had taken it in a little. She had an instinct for beauty in dress and deportment.

But the mother, looking at how well her daughter wore the

*baskets

cheap navy blue costume and the white frilled blouse, and the little round black hat with a fat, fluffy, glossy curl covering each ear, and the black silk stockings with blue clocks in them, and the little black shoes that had laces of three colours in them, got suddenly enraged with...She didn't know with what she got enraged. But for the moment she hated her daughter's beauty, and she remembered all the anguish of giving birth to her and nursing her and toiling for her, for no other purpose than to lose her now and let her go away, maybe to be ravished wantonly because of her beauty and her love of gaiety. A cloud of mad jealousy and hatred against this impersonal beauty that she saw in her daughter almost suffocated the mother, and she stretched out her hands in front of her unconsciously and then just as suddenly her anger vanished like a puff of smoke, and she burst into wild tears, wailing: 'My children, oh, my children, far over the sea you will be carried from me, your mother.' And she began to rock herself and she threw her apron over her head.

Immediately the cabin was full of the sound of bitter wailing. A dismal cry rose from the women gathered in the kitchen. 'Far over the sea they will be carried,' began woman after woman, and they all rocked themselves and hid their heads in their aprons. Michael's mongrel dog began to howl on the hearth. Little Thomas sat down on the hearth beside the dog and puting his arms around him, he began to cry, although he didn't know exactly why he was crying, but he felt melancholy on account of the dog howling and so many people being about.

In the bedroom the son and daughter, on their knees, clung to their mother, who held their heads between her hands and rained kisses on both heads ravenously. After the first wave of tears she had stopped weeping. The tears still ran down her cheeks, but her eyes gleamed and they were dry. There was a fierce look in them as she searched all over the heads of her two children with them, with her brows contracted, searching with a fierce terror-stricken

expression, as if by the intensity of her stare she hoped to keep a living photograph of them before her mind. With her quivering lips she made a queer sound like 'im-m-m-m' and she kept kissing. Her right hand clutched at Mary's left shoulder and with her left she fondled the back of Michael's neck. The two children were sobbing freely. They must have stayed that way a quarter of an hour.

Then the father came into the room, dressed in his best clothes. He wore a new frieze waistcoat, with a grey and black front and a white back. He held his soft black felt hat in one hand and in the other hand he had a bottle of holy water. He coughed and said in a weak gentle voice that was strange to him, as he touched his son: 'Come now, it is time.'

Mary and Michael got to their feet. The father sprinkled them with holy water and they crossed themselves. Then, without looking at their mother, who lay in the chair with her hands clasped on her lap, looking at the ground in a silent tearless stupor, they left the room. Each hurriedly kissed little Thomas, who was not going to Kilmurrage, and then, hand in hand, they left the house. As Michael was going out of the door he picked a piece of loose whitewash from the wall and put it in his pocket. The people filed out after them, down the yard and on to the road, like a funeral procession. The mother was left in the house with little Thomas and two old peasant women from the village. Nobody spoke in the cabin for a long time.

Then the mother rose and came into the kitchen. She looked at the two women, at her little son and at the hearth, as if she were looking for something she had lost. Then she threw her hands into the air and ran out into the yard.

'Come back,' she screamed; 'come back to me.'

She looked wildly down the road with dilated nostrils, her bosom heaving. But there was nobody in sight. Nobody replied. There was a crooked stretch of limestone road, surrounded by grey crags that were scorched by the sun. The road ended in a hill and then dropped out of sight.

The hot June day was silent. Listening foolishly for an answering cry, the mother imagined she could hear the crags simmering under the hot rays of the sun. It was something in her head that was singing.

The two old women led her back into the kitchen. 'There is nothing that time will not cure,' said one. 'Yes, time and patience,' said the other.

Shooting An Elephant

GEORGE ORWELL [1903-1950]

IN Moulmein, in Lower Burma, I was hated by large numbers of people—the only time in my life that I have been important enough for this to happen to me. I was sub-divisional police officer of the town, and in an aimless, petty kind of way anti-European feeling was very bitter. When a nimble Burman tripped me up on the football field and the referee (another Burman) looked the other way, the crowd yelled with hideous laughter.

All this was perplexing and upsetting. For at that time I had already made up my mind that imperialism was an evil thing and the sooner I chucked up my job and got out of it the better. Theoretically—and secretly, of course—I was all for the Burmese and all against their oppressors, the British. As for the job I was doing, I hated it more bitterly than I can perhaps make clear. I was young and ill-educated and I had had to think out my problems in the utter silence that is imposed on every Englishman in the East. I did not even know that the British Empire is dying, still less did I know that it is a great deal better than the younger empires that are going to supplant it.

One day something happened which in a roundabout way was enlightening. It was a tiny incident in itself, but it gave me a better glimpse than I had had before of the real nature of imperialism—the real motives for which despotic governments act. Early one morning the sub-inspector at a police station at the other end of the town rang me up on the 'phone and said that an elephant was ravaging

the bazaar. Would I please come and do something about it? I did not know what I could do, but I wanted to see what was happening and I got on to a pony and started out. I took my rifle, an old .44 Winchester and much too small to kill an elephant, but I thought the noise might be useful. Various Burmans stopped me on the way and told me about the elephant's doings. It was not, of course, a wild elephant, but a tame one which had gone *must*. It had been chained up as tame elephants always are when their attack of *must* is due, but on the previous night it had broken its chain and escaped. Its *mahaout*, the only person who could manage it when it was in that state, had set out in pursuit, but he had taken the wrong direction and was now twelve hours' journey away, and in the morning the elephant had suddenly reappeared in the town. The Burmese population had no weapons and were quite helpless against it. It had already destroyed somebody's bamboo hut, killed a cow and raided some fruit-stalls and devoured the stock; also it had met the municipal rubbish van, and when the driver jumped out and took to his heels, had turned the van over and inflicted violence upon it.

The Burmese sub-inspector and some Indian constables were waiting for me in the quarter where the elephant had been seen. We began questioning the people as to where the elephant had gone, and, as usual, failed to get any definite information. Some of the people said that the elephant had gone in one direction, some said that he had gone in another, some professed not even to have heard of any elephant. I had almost made up my mind that the whole story was a pack of lies, when we heard yells a little distance away. There was a loud, scandalized cry of "Go away, child! Go away this instant!" and an old woman with a switch in her hand came round the corner of a hut, violently shooing away a crowd of naked children. Some more women followed, clicking their tongues and exclaiming; evidently there was something there that the children ought not to have seen. I rounded the hut and saw a man's

dead body sprawling in the mud. The people said that the elephant had come suddenly upon him round the corner of the hut, caught him with its trunk, put its foot on his back and ground him into the earth. As soon as I saw the dead man I sent an orderly to a friend's house nearby to borrow an elephant rifle. I had already sent back the pony, not wanting it to go mad with fright and throw me if it smelled the elephant.

The orderly came back in a few minutes with a rifle and five cartridges, and meanwhile some Burmans had arrived and told us that the elephant was in the paddy fields below, only a few hundred yards away. As I started forward practically the whole population of the quarter flocked out of the houses and followed me. They had seen the rifle and were all shouting excitedly that I was going to shoot the elephant. They had not shown much interest in the elephant when he was merely ravaging their homes, but it was different now that he was going to be shot. It was a bit of fun to them, as it would be to an English crowd; besides, they wanted the meat. It made me vaguely uneasy. I had no intention of shooting the elephant—I had merely sent for the rifle to defend myself if necessary—and it is always unnerving to have a crowd following you. I marched down the hill, looking and feeling a fool, with the rifle over my shoulder and an ever-growing army of people jostling at my heels. At the bottom, when you got away from the huts there was a metalled road and beyond that a miry waste of paddy fields a thousand yards across, not yet ploughed but soggy from the first rains and dotted with coarse grass. The elephant was standing eighty yards from the road, his left side towards us. He took not the slightest notice of the crowd's approach. He was tearing up bunches of grass, beating them against his knees to clean them and stuffing them into his mouth.

I had halted on the road. As soon as I saw the elephant I knew with perfect certainty that I ought not to shoot him. It is a serious matter to shoot a working elephant—it is

comparable to destroying a huge and costly piece of machinery—and obviously one ought not to do it if it can possibly be avoided. And at that distance, peacefully eating, the elephant looked no more dangerous than a cow. I thought then and I think now that his attack of *must* was already passing off; in which case he would merely wander harmlessly about until the *mahaout* came back and caught him. Moreover, I did not in the least want to shoot him. I decided that I would watch him for a little while to make sure that he did not turn savage again, and then go home.

But at that moment I glanced round at the crowd that had followed me. It was an immense crowd, two thousand at the least and growing every minute. It blocked the road for a long distance on either side. I looked at the sea of yellow faces above the garish clothes—faces all happy and excited over this bit of fun, all certain that the elephant was going to be shot. They were watching me as they would watch a conjurer about to perform a trick. They did not like me, but with the magical rifle in my hands I was momentarily worth watching. And suddenly I realised that I should have to shoot the elephant after all. The people expected it of me and I had got to do it. To come all that way, rifle in hand, with two thousand people marching at my heels, and then to trail feebly away, having done nothing ——no, that was impossible. The crowd would laugh at me.

But I did not want to shoot the elephant. I watched him beating his bunch of grass against his knees, with that preoccupied grandmotherly air that elephants have. It seemed to me that it would be murder to shoot him. At that age I was not squeamish about killing animals, but I had never shot an elephant and never wanted to. (Somehow it always seems worse to kill a *large* animal.) Besides, there was the beast's owner to be considered. I turned to some experienced-looking Burmans who had been there when we arrived, and asked them how the elephant had been behaving. They all said the same thing: he took no

notice of you if you left him alone, but he might charge if you went too close to him.

It was perfectly clear to me what I ought to do. I ought to walk up to within, say, twenty-five yards of the elephant and test his behaviour. If he charged I could shoot, if he took no notice of me it would be safe to leave him until the *mahaout* came back. But also I knew that I was going to do no such thing. I was a poor shot with a rifle and the ground was soft mud into which one would sink at every step. If the elephant charged and I missed him, I should have about as much chance as a toad under a steam-roller. But even then I was not thinking particularly of my own skin, only of the watchful yellow faces behind. The sole thought in my mind was that if anything went wrong those two thousand Burmans would see me pursued, caught, trampled on and reduced to a grinning corpse like that up the hill. There was only one alternative. I shoved the cartridges into the magazine and lay down on the road to get a better aim.

The crowd grew very still, and a deep, low, happy sigh, as of people who see the theatre curtain go up at last, breathed from innumerable throats. They were going to have their bit of fun after all. The rifle was a beautiful German thing with cross-hair sights. I did not then know that in shooting an elephant one should shoot to cut an imaginary bar running from ear-hole to ear-hole. I ought, therefore, as the elephant was sideways on, to have aimed straight at his ear-hole; actually I aimed several inches in front of this, thinking the brain would be further forward.

When I pulled the trigger I did not hear the bang or feel the kick—one never does when a shot goes home—but I heard the devilish roar of glee that went up from the crowd. In that instant, in too short a time, one would have thought, even for the bullet to get there, a mysterious terrible change had come over the elephant. He neither stirred nor fell, but every line of his body had altered. He looked suddenly stricken, shrunken, immensely old, as though the frightful

impact of the bullet had paralysed him without knocking him down. At last, after what seemed a long time—it might have been five seconds, I dare say—he sagged flabbily to his knees. His mouth slobbered. An enormous senility seemed to have settled upon him. One could have imagined him thousands of years old. I fired again into the same spot. At the second shot he did not collapse but climbed with desperate slowness to his feet and stood weakly upright, with legs sagging and head drooping. I fired a third time. That was the shot that did for him. You could see the agony of it jolt his whole body and knock the last remnant of strength from his legs. But in falling he seemed for a moment to rise, for as his hind legs collapsed beneath him he seemed to tower upwards like a huge rock toppling, his trunk reaching skyward like a tree. He trumpeted, for the first and only time. And then down he came, his belly towards me, with a crash that seemed to shake the ground even where I lay.

I got up. The Burmans were already racing past me across the mud. It was obvious that the elephant would never rise again, but he was not dead. He was breathing very rhythmically with long rattling gasps, his great mound of a side painfully rising and falling. His mouth was wide open—I could see far down into caverns of pale pink throat. I waited a long time for him to die, but his breathing did not weaken. Finally I fired my two remaining shots into the spot where I thought his heart must be. The thick blood welled out of him like red velvet, but still he did not die. His body did not even jerk when the shots hit him, the tortured breathing continued without a pause. He was dying, very slowly and in great agony, but in some world remote from me where not even a bullet could damage him further. I felt that I had got to put an end to that dreadful noise. It seemed dreadful to see the great beast lying there, powerless to move and yet powerless to die, and not even to be able to finish him. I sent back for my small rifle and poured shot after shot into his heart and down

his throat. They seemed to make no impression. The tortured gasps continued as steadily as the ticking of a clock.

In the end I could not stand it any longer and went away. I heard later that it took him half an hour to die. Burmans were arriving with dahs and baskets even before I left, and I was told they had stripped his body almost to the bones by the afternoon.

Afterwards, of course, there were endless discussions about the shooting of the elephant. I was very glad that the coolie had been killed; it put me legally in the right and it gave me a sufficient pretext for shooting the elephant. I often wondered whether any of the others grasped that I had done it solely to avoid looking a fool.

The Signature

MULK RAJ ANAND [1907-]

THERE is something sacred about a signature: it makes everything valid, puts the seal upon all undertakings, makes bonds real, guarantees securities, cements pacts of friendship and alliance between states, provides the ultimate proofs of integrity in the highest courts of law—the signature is all in all. Even poets when they publish new poems often call them New Signatures. And the radio uses a signature tune as its patent or hallmark. But especially do banks honour the signature; certainly they will not honour anything which does not bear a signature: to them the signature is almost omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, supreme!

Now, though everyone who draws a cheque knows the importance of the signature to the bank, through bitter experience of cheques coming back with the usual slip if they do not bear the signature, or if the signature is slightly wonky or blurred, there are still two kinds of people who have not yet realized the value of the signature. These are respectively some of the feudal gentry, who live in the 'Indian India' or the mofussil or on large estates in the country, and the very poor, who have no bank accounts to their credit at all.

Of course, it may be said in extenuation of the last class of people that the reason why they dishonour the signature is because they have been left illiterate. For they do make every attempt to come to scratch when a document is presented to them by putting their thumbs forward for the

blacking and imprint the very image of their soul, the mark of that stumpy, reliable finger onto the page, thus honouring the unwritten convention that a mark of some kind is necessary in order to prove a person's integrity. But the conspicuous disregard of this convention by the former class of people, the feudal gentry, is rather surprising to say the least and betokens an attitude which though rather charming causes serious difficulties, particularly to the business of banking—so the bankers say.

As the banks, nowadays, are trying very hard to interest the feudal gentry to convert their gold into cash and let it flow, so that money could not remain buried in the earth in the classic tradition of our country and make a Midas of every grandee, but as the nobility are incorrigibly lazy in appreciating the values of modernity, there is a polite war going on between the nobility of the old world and nobility of the new order.

Perhaps one cannot call the tension that prevails between these brothers a polite war so much as a war of politeness, for there is no ill will in this struggle, or hatred or even contempt; there is only a certain impatience or irritation which is so often followed by laughter that it is more amusement than disdain.

One of the most amusing illustrations of this little war was provided the other day by the goings on between Nawab Luqman Ali Khan Bahadur, nobleman and dignitary of Aliabad State, a director of the India and Commonwealth Bank Ltd and Mr. C. Subramaniam, assistant manager of this bank.

The India and Commonwealth Bank Ltd is a small but steady bank founded about ten years ago, and which, with the coming of freedom, has been seeking to increase its business to contribute something to the making of the new India. In pursuance of this very laudable desire, they had recently promised a big loan on good interest, to a new optical industry which was being set up by an enterprising young entrepreneur against the most unquestionably sound

guarantee. The papers were ready and had been duly signed by all the Directors save Nawab Luqman Ali Khan Bahadur. That was the situation and there was nothing very complicated or controversial about it. But Nawab Luqman Ali Khan, who had been sent the papers several weeks ago, had just not taken the trouble to sign them and return them. Meanwhile, the entreprising entrepreneur felt that the people of India were fast going blind for want of good eye-glasses, and the bank's normal business was held up.

The manager of the bank, Mr. Hormusji Pestonji Bankwala, wrote many letters reminding the Nawab Sahib Bahadur about his signature on the documents, but there was no reply.

As on all those occasions, when there is no answer to a letter, people begin to worry and postulate the most extraordinary fears and establish the strangest hypotheses, Mr. Bankwala began to think all kinds of things and got into a panic. The documents may have been looted on the way to Aliabad, he felt, for quite a few trains had been held up by armed gangs recently and ransacked, or the Nawab may have fallen a prey to a stray bullet in a riot, or he may have gone away to Pakistan. Anything was possible. As he waited day after day, the whole business became very nerve-racking, for the other directors might soon get to know that this loan was still pending and might feel he was inefficient.

So, after much worrying he thought of a desperate stratagem: he would send the assistant manager, Mr. Subramaniam, to see Nawab Luqman Ali Khan at Aliabad and to get his signature on all the documents. Subramaniam had won his way to assistant managership of the bank by dint of his command of figures as well as fingers and with a certain sullen efficiency which, though not exactly American, was typical of the new Indian pioneers. Therefore, Mr. Bankwala sent Mr. Subramaniam to Aliabad, not by rail, as that was not quick enough now after the Nawab's delays, but by air.

To the hard-working Subramaniam, who had, during twenty years' grind, got into a certain exact and unvaried relationship with the office table and chair, this air trip was an extraordinary adventure and not altogether pleasant. For one thing, he was told by friends that it would be very cold in the air, and he went to the airline office, loaded with a holdall full of blankets which made his luggage so heavy that he had to pay excess from his own pocket. Then, his digestion, trained on *sambhar* and *rasam,* revolted at the very first bite on the biscuits served by the air-hostess, and he felt and looked like a shrivelled-up porcupine all the way. A further affliction was that at the midway station where breakfast was served, he had to eat with implements other than those with which he had been used to eat in his orthodox life before. And he made a fool of himself in the eyes of a couple of Indian dandies who were meticulous with their knives and forks and snobbishly contemptuous of those who were not so adroit. And when, at last, he alighted from the bus at the airline office in the main street of Aliabad, he found himself in an incredibly native atmosphere where everyone was dressed in flowing Indian robes and he felt like a monkey in his badly tailored suit.

He tried to look for a taxi, but though some Buicks glided by, there was no motor vehicle available for hire. Perforce, he had to mount on to a strange horse carriage called an *ekka*, from which his legs dangled like the legs of a scarecrow being transported to the fields. All he could see being sold in the shops were colourful bangles and velvet shoes and *pan-biri*, and Subramaniam, who had gone half way to modernity, thought that he had come to the backwoods and felt very depressed about it all, added to which was the usual panic at going to a strange place.

When he got to Zeenat Mahal, the palace of the Nawab Sahib Bahadur, he was further confused. For all the servants sitting around the hubble-bubble in the hall gave him the once-over, cocked their eyes at each other and remained immobile. Apparently they had been trained only

to bow and scrape to the other noblemen of Aliabad, and a mere Madrasi, with *pince-nez*, arriving in an *ekka* was not *persona grata*.

Mr. Subramaniam produced his card and asked to see the Nawab Luqman Ali Khan Sahib.

This time it was the servants and retainers who were confused, for no one had, within living memory, produced a white ticket of that kind with the request that it be transported to the Nawab Sahib.

The Jemadar took it with gingerly fingers; and as Mr. Subramaniam added a staccato phrase in Angrezi speech, this dignitary ran towards the inner sanctum like a lame duck. Meanwhile, the other servants dispersed like wizened cocks fluttering away from the rubbish heap at the approach of a human being.

Mr. Subramaniam began to settle with the *ekka* driver who, unlike the Bombay ghariwallahs, immediately accepted what he was given, salaamed and went off.

The Jemadar emerged after protracted confabulations which would provide the clue to what was happening to him, but the Jemadar was silent, only being most polite and accommodating, bowing and salaaming now in a manner that seemed more than obsequious. And then he left Mr. Subramaniam with the words:

'Please, rest and wait.'

Mr Subramaniam took off his jacket and his shoes and lay back in the arm-chair in the veranda. In a little while a servant came and apprised him of the fact that the bath was ready. This made Mr. Subramaniam feel that things were moving after all. But when he had finished his bath, changed into a new suit and came to rest in the arm-chair with a tea-tray in front of him, nothing happened again, except the passage of time on his wrist watch, and he began to feel anxious. The laws of politeness in a Muhammadan household did not permit him to probe into any corner even of the garden, lest there should be someone in purdah whose chastity might be outraged by the glance of a

stranger's eye. The servants seemed to have all disappeared too. Mr. Subramaniam's hold on Hindustani speech was too precarious to permit him to shout and call the Jemadar.

As the afternoon advanced towards the evening, Mr. Subramaniam's anxiety became a little more akin to irritation. And he began to pace up and down the veranda almost as though he was a prisoner of time. But this parade was not of much avail, and after he had walked to and fro for a quarter of an hour he sat down again and began to write a letter to the Nawab Sahib.

When he was half way through the letter, the Nawab Luqman Ali Khan Sahib appeared; a jolly, round figure, dressed in a spotless white silk *achken*, tight trousers and a strange Aliabad-style round turban with no parting in front. He was the very soul of affability, charm, grace and good humour, for he greeted Mr Subramaniam almost as though the assistant bank manager was a long-lost friend.

'I hope you had a nice journey. And have my servants been looking after you ?....Of course you can't expect the comforts of such a modern city as Bombay in my humble abode....But we have a few modern places you know.... For instance, there is the Aliabad Club. I am just going there and you must come and meet my friends...'

'Sir, I would like to discuss those papers with you,' Mr. Subramaniam interrupted. 'You see, Sir, I have especially come to get your signature....'

'Oh come, come, my dear fellow, you take work too seriously. After all you have just arrived and you must see a bit of life. To be sure, we are not as advanced as you in Bombay, but....And we shall see about business matters tomorrow morning. After all it doesn't take long to put my signature on paper....Come, don't worry. I want you particularly to meet Nawab Haider Ali, the Home Minister, and Nawab Wajid Mahmud, the Education Minister, and Prof. Ram Ratan Gupta....Mr Gupta is our Finance Minister, here. He is a wizard. He can count anything at a moment's notice....Come along now....' And he

slapped Subramaniam's back with such cordiality that the poor South Indian nearly broke into two.

Soon, however, Mr. Subramaniam found himself seated in a beautiful Dodge and being dodged away across intricate bazaars towards the cantonment and then through the magnificent portals of the Aliabad Club into the monumental palace which housed this august institution.

But while the drive was fairly diverting because the Nawab Sahib kept up a running commentary on the wonders of Aliabad, Mr. Subramaniam's small soul, brought up on an occasional shivering visit to the C.C.I., shuddered with the fear of the unknown on his entry into the hall and shrunk into nothingness in the face of the grandees who were assembled here in silk robes and golden turbans and velvet shoes. When he was introduced to the various dignitaries and they rose to shake hands with him, the four fingers of his right hand with which he usually touched other people's hands, simply wilted like the falling petals of a dirty flower. One dignitary, Nawab Wajid Mahmud, took it upon himself to instruct Mr. Subramaniam in the art of shaking hands.

'You know, my friend,' this nobleman began, 'the hand-shake is the symbol of affection and goodwill. Let this love show itself with some warmth. When a person's hand clasps yours, give your full hand, with its real grip, and not the four miserable fingers....'

This overwhelmed Mr Subramaniam, until he blushed, flushed and began to perspire profusely. And all he wanted was to be able to come to scratch, for there was no denying that this was life brimming over as it were, with warmth and hospitality. But his eye-glasses were blurred with the smoke of confusion and he was intensely relieved when he could sink back into a chair and contract into the littlest and most insignificant being on earth.

Nawab Luqman Ali Khan Sahib was much in demand. And for a while he went about meeting his friends. Meanwhile, the waiter, who looked like a Nawab himself, brought

a bottle of whisky and some tumblers and began to pour out the liquor.

Soon Nawab Luqman Ali brought the Home Minister and the Finance Minister around.

Mr. Subramaniam had tasted whisky twice or thrice and liked it, but his wife had smelt his breath and had given him a long lecture about how he was going to the dogs. Since then, he had found it easier to resist the temptation. But the whisky had already been poured and there was no avail against the persuasive tongue of the Nawab Sahib, his host, especially as the other noblemen added their pleas to his in a most gracious Hindustani speech. And then the *samosas* and *pakoras* arrived, with lashings of *podina* pickle and the southerner in Mr. Subramanium felt the call of chillies.

And soon he was happy, happier than he had been for years, and those delicate negotiations for which he had been sent here were obliterated by the fumes of alcohol and the seven-course dinner to which Nawab Wajid Mahmud, the Education Minister, insisted on taking the company in the club dining-room after the appetisers.

Mr. Subramaniam slept soundly that night and was as good as dead to the world.

The next morning he felt the existence of a slight hangover.

When he had sufficiently recovered his senses it was about noon. He finished his previous day's letter to the Nawab Sahib and sent that in, requesting him to sign the documents.

There was no answer. Only the Jemadar had returned to the hall and sat smoking the hubble-bubble.

And when Mr. Subramaniam made so bold as to inquire about the papers, the Jemadar replied that the Nawab Sahib was still asleep but he was due to wake up soon, for there was to be a midday meal in honour of Mr. Subramaniam to which various friends of the Nawab Sahib were coming.

Mr. Subramaniam felt more frustrated than flattered on

hearing this announcement. And then there was the residue of guilt in his callow soul about his fall the previous evening. So he began to pace up and down the veranda of the guest-house again and, fatigued by this useless occupation, he sat back in the arm-chair and tried to cultivate patience.

The warmth of the morning conduced to a light slumber and he only awoke when the Jemadar shook him and told him the meal was ready and the guests had arrived.

If the dinner at the Club had been a comparatively mild seven-course meal, the lunch at the Nawab Sahib's house was hospitality in the proper sense of that word, as it is understood in Aliabad. There was saffron-tinted *pilaos* and rich *kormas* and tasty *kababs* and fish and fowl cooked in the most luscious gravies. And even though Mr. Subramaniam took a little of everything his stomach, which was about the size of his fist or less, took in more than was good for him. And he found himself feeling drowsier and drowsier and could not even cope with the polite conversation about finance which Mr. Ram Ratan Gupta had started, far less bring the Nawab Sahib, his host, to talk of anything so concrete as those documents.

Nawab Luqman Ali Khan himself took the initiative to remind after lunch that after siesta that afternoon he would bring out the papers to the guest-house and go over them if Allah willed it so. But Allah did not will it so.

For though Mr. Subramaniam kept a vigil against all the seductions of sleep that afternoon, the Nawab Sahib was deep in slumber till the evening. And then he came like a whirlwind to ask Mr. Subramaniam to get dressed to go to the dinner to which Mr. Ram Ratan Gupta had graciously invited them. 'Don't worry about the papers,' he added. 'I have got them out and they are lying on my bedside table to sign first thing tomorrow morning.'

So vociferously persuasive was the Nawab Sahib in imparting this information that Mr. Subramaniam could not put a word in edgeways. And, perforce, he went in

and began to dress for dinner.

The dinner in Mr. Subramaniam's honour, given by Mr. Gupta, was as rich and sumptuous as the lunch given by Nawab Ali Khan, only the number of vegetable dishes exceeded the meat dishes. But the general nature of hospitality was the same, till Mr. Subramaniam began to recognize the unmistakable pattern of grace in Aliabad. There even followed the 'chain effect'. Nawab Haider Ali suggested that it was his turn to invite Mr. Subramaniam now and that he would be happy if the honoured guest and the rest of the company would come to the hunting lodge on his estate that very evening, for he had received a message from his shikaris to say that a tiger had eaten the goat tied near the *machan* and was likely to repeat its visit. The laws of Aliabad hospitality demanded an acceptance of this noble suggestion and the company got into cars and were off into the depths of the night illumined by a million stars.

The food and drink had broken the defences in Mr. Subramaniam's soul enough for him to lend himself to the seductions of this drive. Never before in his life had he tasted the delights of so novel an adventure as a tiger-hunt. And, though he felt a slight hazard in this game, the fresh air and the impact of the dense forests through which they were passing made him forget everything and yield to a 'no-care' attitude. As for those documents, how could one think of anything so obscene in the midst of this vast anonymity where nature seemed to cancel out all questions, especially banking?

And, later, the exhaustion of the tense wait for the tiger to appear, as they sat on top of the *machan,* blotted out even his sense of individuality.

The tiger did not oblige the hunters by appearing, and, after a hearty breakfast served in Nawab Haider Ali's lodge, the party returned home, to go to bed when the rest of mankind had begun to resume its hold on work.

Mr. Subramaniam slept the clock round.

When he woke up he suddenly found himself in a panic.

It was strange how this confusion had come on him. But he sensed disaster. And, true to his prognostications, disaster it was that overtook him. For the Jemadar came and told him that the Nawab Sahib had been urgently called away to his estates in Madhopur and had left a message that Mr. Subramaniam Sahib was to wait till his return.

'But when will he return?' asked Subramaniam.

'Nawab Sahib did not say,' answered the Jemadar.

'How long does he go for when he does go to his estate?'

'May be a month, may be a week, *huzoor*.'

Mr. Subramaniam let out an involuntary shriek of horror, which he later tried to disguise as the belchings of an over-taxed stomach. His whole body was warm with the heat of anger, resentment, fear and forced ingratitude.

'Go and fetch the papers from the Nawab's bedside table,' he said to the Jemadar.

The Jemadar paused for a moment and looked askance at him.

Mr. Subramaniam understood. He took a ten-rupee note from his pocket and gave it to the servant.

'Fetch the papers and get my luggage ready.' he said. 'And hurry up. For God's sake, hurry up.'

The Jemadar obeyed the commands of the honoured guest implicitly. What was more, he put the documents, Mr. Subramaniam and the luggage into the Ford which was waiting outside the hall and bade him a most respectful farewell.

Mr. Subramaniam took the night train back to Bombay, having to sleep on the floor of a second-class carriage because he had not booked his berth in advance.

He was shivering with the ague of a terrible fear when he arrived at Victoria Terminus the next morning, for he was sure that he would be sacked as soon as he appeared at the bank.

But Mr. Hormusji Pestonji Bankwala understood all as soon as the papers were put before him without the signature

of the Nawab on them. He only asked Mr. Subramaniam to look for the documents on which the first and only signature of Nawab Luqman Ali Khan appeared. And he had a rubber stamp made of this precious mark, impression, or whatever you would like to call it and soon had the necessary papers ready to sanction the loan to the entrepreneur who had set his heart on preventing the people of India from going blind. He cursed himself for not having thought of this simple expedient earlier.

'What is there so wonderful in a signature!' he said. Mr. Subramaniam lifted his eyes from the desk and signified agreement with a terrific forward movement of his abject little head and torso.

Collision in A Thick Fog

LIEUT-COMMANDER NICHOLAS MONSARRAT
R.N.V.R. [1910-]

WE were in collision, in thick fog, with a Protuguese trawler on one of our homeward trips; very little was damaged besides the port boat and a section of bow-plating, but while it lasted the encounter was impressive.

Fog tests the judgment very highly indeed, particularly in convoy, where the way in which a nearby ship can fade away as if washed over with dirty chalk, makes station-keeping half guess-work and half a sort of direction-finding by ear. All the senses are alert. You stand on the bridge, sniffing cold, vaporous air, listening to and trying to tabulate the various fog-horns, staring at the blank wall ahead. With the engines at "slow" and the oily sea making no noise against the bows, the silence is extraordinary. Deceptive also: fog blankets the sound in some directions, magnifies it in others. The look-out or the signalman will sing out "Whistle on the starboard beam!" when you have just classified the sound as coming from dead astern, if not slightly to port....Either may be right: it's not a question of good hearing or even of practice; it is luck. The signal-man may have heard the sound directly, you may have heard reflected off a layer or a bank of colder air. You cannot know for certain: all that is certain is that you must make up your mind, and then act—decisively, unhesitatingly—one way or another.

But in this case confusions of sound did not enter into it: the trawler, lit but silent, came at us at right angles on the port bow. If she had not hit us she would have hit

one of the ships in convoy. We sighted her lights about a minute before the collision; she was moving far too fast, and there came the instant realisation (felt rather than calculated) that we could not miss each other. Having given all possible orders ("One short blast"—"Hard a-starboard"—"Full astern"——"Sound mess-deck alarm bell"—"Close watertight doors") we could only stand on the bridge and wait for it. There was a sound of air going into life-jackets at high pressure....The lights, suddenly very near and menacing, seemed to throw themselves at us; there was one startled shout from the bridge of the trawler and then the crash.

Not a sharp crash but a long drawn-out grinding. Due to our quick turn to starboard we had closed on a converging course, our port bow to his starboard one, instead of a right-angle cut which might well have sunk one or other of us. The two ships closed, surging against each other, parted momentarily, and then closed again: expensive smashing noises came from up forrard, and below me the port boat, splint red and stove-in, was forced over its griping spar and fell inboard. We could see the trawler clearly now, in the few moments before she sheered off: a big, heavily-built ship with high spoon bows and one man on the bridge staring up at us as if roughly wakened from a deep dream. Perhaps such was the case. Then we drifted apart and the trawler faded out once more till only her lights could be seen.

Sent below by the Captain to see what the damage was, I forced my way through a throng of half-asleep and rather reproachful ratings, and went into the mess-decks. It was odd, and disconcerting, to see light through the bow-plating, but the main damage seemed to be well above the water-line, the forepeak being still quite dry and in fact remaining so for the rest of the trip. (Rough weather, of course, would have made it quite a different matter, but we were lucky in that respect.) I attended to one casualty, a surprised steward who had been thrown out of his cot and

had cracked a rib, and then went up to the bridge to report.

Up on the bridge also was a Leading Stoker, a reputed linguist, who had been summoned to address the trawler through the loud-hailer. The exchange was a short one, and inconclusive at that. He called out: "Barco! Habla Inglese?" and the answer came back: "Portuguese ship! You damn' fool!" And that was really all. She claimed no damage, we were fit to proceed, and there was a convoy to attend to; so after we had prised her name and number out of her (a long and disjointed business, sounding rather like a badly translated play) we rang "Slow ahead" and got back on our course. It might have been very much worse, and thoughts of leave while the ship was under repair certainly sweetened the rest of the watch.

The Patriot

ALICE WEBB [1876]

WAR had been declared some weeks before the news came as far as our place. It was mail day, and we were looking out of the door every few minutes to see who would get the first sight of M'Intosh's pack-horse on the far cutting. Nugget, the old white horse we used for odd jobs, had been saddled some time, and was standing with the reins on his neck, fast asleep. It was never any good to start to our mail box, a soap box nailed on the side of a high stump two miles from the house, until the pack-horse was in sight coming down Gentle Annie, because he had to jog about three miles to the junction, driven by M'Intosh, who was never in a hurry, knowing as he did all the happenings in the outside world.

When mail day only comes round once a fortnight, the last hour or two before the mailman comes seems interminable.

We had, as was our custom, knocked off an hour early on mail day, and were busy preparing our dinner. I think on most back-block holdings mail day is kept as a kind of Sunday or holiday. I know it was with us. We kept Sunday, too, in a kind of half-hearted way: that is to say, we did not go on with the usual work, fencing or scrub-cutting or whatever we were doing at the time. Instead, we washed and mended our clothes and swept the house out, and sometimes hung our blankets out in the sun to air, if we thought of it. Jim used to mend our boots also: it was a day for quiet jobs and a change from our everyday

occupations, and we had our dinner at twelve and made a plum duff because there was time to cook it while we were all about. That was the best we could do for Sundays, but the real holiday of the week was Friday, the day when we got the papers and the letters from those dear to us from whom we were separated.

M'Intosh seemed to be later than ever that day. We had put on the potatoes to boil, and the billy of fresh water for the tea hung over the fire also. It was my turn to ride across for the mail bag, so Jim was trimming the fat off the chops ready for frying, and throwing the trimmings to the dogs. At last he called to me, as I was fetching an armful of dry wood up, 'He's coming.'

I did not take long about chucking that wood into the corner and getting on old Nugget, and Nugget, knowing the different manners of his riders, did not take long about waking up from his dreams and lumping himself along the track to the boundary gate either. M'Intosh, contrary to his morose habit of life, which usually induced him to thrust our mail into the box and slouch on down the main track with only a grunt for salutation, sat upon his horse waiting, and as I came within earshot he called, 'War is declared, Jack!'

'What war?' I said. 'Civil war in Ireland?' For the papers had been full of Home Rule and Irish unrest for weeks back, and as it was two weeks since we had seen a paper, and the newest we ever got were two days old when they reached us, there was time for quite a lot to take place in the world without our knowledge or consent.

'German war,' said M'Intosh briefly. 'Fools! war—madness, I call it. Picking a quarrel with all the world at once. Fools!' He gave a final grunt of farewell, and jogged heavily away after the pack-horse, now out of sight on his way to the township, nine or ten miles away, where their journey ended.

I grabbed the mail bag and raced for home. At last there was a change in the monotony of things: life would

begin to move, we should have real news to read and talk over. I arrived at the door in a hot state of excitement shouting the news to Jim as I came, in much the same fashion that M'Intosh had used towards me. Like myself Jim's first thought was of Ireland. He also gave a sigh of relief on being told that the trouble was elsewhere. Jim was older than I by some years, and had only missed taking a share in the Boer War by the, to him, unfortunate fact that peace was declared just as he succeeded in getting himself accepted for the last contingent. He had been across to South Africa but was not able to remain there in the South African Constabulary, as he had hoped, for health reasons and family claims.

These claims and reasons would keep him at home still if there should be any volunteer forces used in the war now commencing. As we sat over our dinner, reading the papers and talking of the news contained in our home letters, we decided that there would be no need for colonial aid to England. 'Probably it is all over now,' said Jim. 'One week would be quite long enough to lay out Germany.'

But when his week had gone, and another week after it, and still Germany was not 'laid out', we began to consider the possibilities of a Dominion contingent, and discuss my chance of acceptance in it should I be able to offer myself. It seemed, somehow, impossible to keep quietly pegging away at our work. Anyway, I could not. Old Jim seemed to manage to give his attention to the usual dull round of work. The section we were working was nominally mine; that is, I was the lucky one who drew it in the land ballot. Old Jim was my partner, and it was his savings which had purchased the sheep we had on the place. We had got it ring-fenced, because, of course, the drawers of the adjoining sections had done their share towards that, and we had built the house, or rather Jim had; I am not much of a carpenter.

Now we were busy with the second subdivision fence, which was to enclose about ten acres of extra good land near

the house, which we hoped to stump and plough ready for the sowing of turnips for the fattening sheep.

Somehow it seemed as if nothing of that kind mattered any more. It was all very well for Jim to say that it was a duty of every patriot to work harder than ever on his land, and to raise more fat stock and grow more wool, and all that sort of thing. To me it seemed more of a duty to get on my way to the front as soon as possible, and just finish up the war right at the beginning, because, of course, if a few of our Dominion boys got on to the Germans they'd have it all settled up quick and lively. Anyway, that was what I thought at the time, and I must say old Jim was jolly decent about it. He used to laugh at me a good deal, particularly when I kept making excuses to get off to the township, being unable to wait for mail day to come round and give us the news. And looking back on it all now, I see that he was awfully patient with me. There are very few chaps who would have just kept on pegging away at the fence alone, and done more than half of the odd jobs round too, and never a growl out of him all the time. And the work went on quickly too. By the time the Government had despatched the first lot of men, the crowd that went to Samoa, our fence was done, and the stumping was started.

I had quite made up my mind to offer to go with the next crowd that went to the front if I could get myself accepted. I remember as if it were yesterday my feelings on the night when I sent in my name to the Defence Force authorities. There had been what was called 'a patriotic social' in the township, which I attended—you know the kind of thing they have in these little places. There is a great display of red, white, and blue in the decorations, most of the people wear colours in their buttonholes, it is not thought rude to join in the chorus of any patriotic songs, and you have a jolly good supper, sometimes a dance too. For all this you pay 1s. or 2s. 6d. if it's a dance as well, and you have the time of your life, 'proceeds in aid of the starving Belgians' or 'to benefit the War Fund.'

All the same, I agree with Jim in thinking that the 'starving Belgians' would have got a shock if they had seen us stuffing ourselves with cake and sandwiches in their interests, and that the War Funds might have benefited to a larger extent if the money spent on hire of halls, and lighting, etc., had been given straight out. I don't count costs of advertising and so forth, because nearly all newspapers were doing that free for the good of the cause. Jim would not go to any of the patriotic parties. He said he would give what he could spare all the same, but he'd give it straight out. He had a map with pins to mark the progress of events on the wall by his bed, and he used to be always poring over that when I got home, unless it were very late, in which case he was fast asleep in bed.

Well, as I said, the night I sent in my name, I had been to such a party. There were short speeches by various prominent men, and much chorus singing and display of colours, and when the chairman said that he had the needful forms of application to the Defence Department in the little back room awaiting the signatures of any who were offering, I went and put my name down, together with two other fellows. For all their singing of 'Tipperary' and 'Rule Britannia' there did not appear to be an overwhelming rush from our district, although people had given some horses, and more cash than you would have thought could be raised in so short a time.

I rode home feeling very elated. If I were taken what a change I was in for. All the pleasure of a real good holiday, all the excitement of a fight, and the knowledge that my expenses would be guaranteed as well. I wasn't thinking then of the scanty rations, the damp beds, sore feet and wearing uncertainty which one who takes part in a war has to bear as best he may. When I got home Jim was fast asleep, and it struck me that he was growing awefully thin and haggard-looking. And as I got into bed I began to think whether I had done quite a fair thing in volunteering without consulting him (for though we had spoken of my going it had been

more as a joke than with any serious intension); since, if I went he must be left to face the heavy drag of the half-yearly payments still to be made on the section.

Still, it was done now, and one must be patriotic and serve one's country in its hour of need. So I concluded that I was right after all, and in the morning, when I told Jim about it, he said it was only what he had been expecting to hear for a week or two back and that he thought he could manage all right by a little extra hard work, if I left him a power of attorney, and we put all our affairs in order. So that day we both went into the township for once, and we made all our arrangements, and I received a wire ordering me to report to the nearest town for medical inspection, which I did, riding straight on, while Jim went home alone.

In the town I got a bad disappointment for, having passed the doctor easily enough, I found the military authorities would not take my horse, as he was above the regulation height, and too heavy as well. This was a facer, because I had put my name down as bringing my own horse and saddle.

I went home feeling pretty sick about it, with orders to come into camp tomorrow, and go into training for the foot regiment if a horse was not procurable. Fancy me on foot; I don't suppose I had walked half a dozen miles at a stretch in my life.

I reached the house about tea-time, full of gloom. With a decent horse I could be back the same evening and ready to go into Palmerston Camp with the other fellows from our part.

Of course if it had been Jim who had volunteered there would have been no difficulty. On his last birthday his uncle in Gisborne had given him a horse that—well it was a horse—just the right size and a good black. He had owned that animal nearly a year now, and the fuss he made over it amused all our neighbours. I knew he had refused lots of money for Dan, as he called it. He often said money would not buy that horse. Well, it was no good thinking of it; I

should have to be a 'gravel scratcher' after all, but I did not feel half as patriotic as I had done the day before.

When I reached the house I found Jim had got our meal ready, and had been putting my razor and a few handkerchiefs and socks and things together for me. 'Hurry up, Jack,' he said, 'Get your tea down and be ready, I've heard all about it from M'Intosh when he brought the mail in. I'll have mine later. You just hurry while I get your horse,' and he went out. I ate what tea I could, thinking that he was getting old Nugget for me to go up to the township and go on by coach. When I had finished I went out, and there was Dan ready with Jim's new saddle on, and my swag* fastened on all ready. I could not say a thing. I just stared. 'You'll have to take my saddle, Jack,' said a sort of growling voice from the other side of the horse. 'Yours doesn't fit him. Good-bye, old man, good luck.' Jim emerged from behind Dan, shook me violently by the hand, and began fiddling with the bridle. I stammered something, I don't quite know what, but he would not listen to a word, so at last I mounted and rode away while he returned to the lonely house and shut the door.

The time in camp was like a real picnic. I liked my camp mates. I liked the drill, the uniform, and all the military trappings amused me. Dan was beyond question the finest horse in our company, and everything was just as lively and altogether good as my highest expectations. Old Jim wrote regularly and fairly cheerfully; he seemed to be getting along with the work like a steam engine. As he stumped at one end of the paddock a neighbour had been engaged to begin ploughing at the other end, so that no time or weather should be lost. But the luck was not with him—it never was. Although he got the work finished and the seed in at the right time the weather wasn't right. The bright, hot days that made the camp such a cheery place kept the ground hard and dry, and the seed lay idly in the

*bundle of belongings

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soil, making no sign of sprouting.

High winds raged day and night for a fortnight after the only shower those turnips had on them, and so that crop failed. The sheep that should have been sold fat were a drug in the market, as stores, and the money they should have brought was needed for that half-yearly payment due on the land.

Jim sold some of his private possessions to make up the shortage, although I did not know that at the time. He wrote me a hearty letter of good wishes just as we went on board ship to sail, in which he said that the payment had been made all right on the due date, and not to worry, but to do my duty and serve the King as a man should.

There was a great public farewell to us all in the Basin Reserve in Wellington, and a procession through the streets afterwards. Women cried, and bands played, and men shook everybody near them by the hand whether they knew them or not, and what with all the cheering and excitement, we thought ourselves jolly fine fellows, I can tell you. 'Defenders of the Empire's honour' and 'Upholders of the cause of justice' and phrases of that sort are calculated to give a young fellow what is known as 'swelled head'. And then in the middle of it all I had a mental vision of Old Jim, doing two men's work and fighting an uneven battle in lonely dullness, and a heavy weight of unshared liabilities to face as best he could, giving up his cherished Dan, with the almost certain knowledge that he would never see him again, bearing it all so cheerfully and putting up such a plucky fight, and I said to myself. 'I wonder after all which of us is the Patriot?'

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NOTES AND SUGGESTIONS

Try to develop your powers of literary criticism. Which of these stories have you found exciting, amusing, farcical, romantic or sentimental? Which would you judge to have clever plots?

How Mordred was Slain and Arthur Hurt to the Death

Note: some of the original language of this story has been modernised. It was first printed in 1485.

The plot of the story may be described as follows:— 1. King Arthur and his son, Sir Mordred, meet to discuss their quarrel, but both warn their armies to attack if they see any sword drawn. 2. They come to an agreement. 3. A knight is stung by an adder. 4. The knight draws his sword to kill the adder. 5. A terrible battle results.

Draw up for yourself a similar simple plot of four or five 'happenings' which caused an atomic war.

A Serpent Mystery

This is taken, slightly shortened, from W.H. Hudson's *Far Away and Long Ago*. December was summer where Hudson wrote about. What other evidence can you find in the story as to where this might have been?

Compare this story with Kipling's. Which do you prefer, and why?

Cabuliwallah

Write a short account of the character of the author of this story as displayed in it.

Dirty Work

This story comes from W.W. Jacobs' *Deep Waters.* It has been slightly shortened. What did the landlord of

the Bear's Head imply by calling the night-watchman's work a 'sleeping-in job'? 'Once I had made up my mind to do what was right...' Would you say that this sentence implies censure, irony, sarcasm, or satire?

Rikki-Tikki-Tavi

This story, from Kipling's *The Jungle Book* has been shortened.

Mrs. Packletide's Tiger

In the first paragraph there is evidence of the time or date when and about which this story was written. Can you find this?

Notice how *Saki* develops the plot of the story, and make a list of the times you first get a hint of something that is to happen later.

Some of the words and allusions will be unfamiliar to you, and the following information may help:

'deviation towards the footsteps of Nimrod'–Nimrod was a mighty hunter, so this means becoming a hunter.

'ostensibly' here means professedly, to outward appearances.

'propitious' means favourable.

'rendezvous' means a place where you go.

'antecedents' are things that have gone before, here the tiger's earlier life.

'market depreciation' means loss of value.

'accelerated by senile decay' means hastened by old age.

'connived at the fiction' means winked at or overlooked the pretence.

The *Novoe Vremya* was a Russian illustrated paper, something like the *Onlooker*.

Curzon Street, the Manor House, the County – Mrs. Packletide, who was a rich woman, had a house in London in Curzon Street, and another in the country, the Manor House. The 'county' are the rich people who have country houses.

Diana was the goddess of hunting.

Les Fauves is the French for 'The Wild Beasts'.

'incidental expenses' here means expenses that are extra, unexpected, unplanned.

Name the crime that *Saki* implies Miss Mebbin had been guilty of.

The Flood

This story, which has been shortened, is from Walter de la Mare's *Stories from the Bible*. He was a poet, and you will notice the difference between his language, full of imagery, and that of more matter-of-fact or prosaic stories. Pick out some ten words or expressions used in this story that you would not expect to find in a newspaper article.

Village Well

After reading this story, have a debate among your classfellows on what has been done to put right the social wrongs from which the Harijans suffer, and how far these steps are being successful.

The Great Sermon Handicap

P.G. Wodehouse was one of the great modern humorous writers, and so many enjoyed his stories, lying between the comic and the farcical, that Oxford University made him a Doctor of Literature, and he was knighted shortly before his death. This story, here a little shortened, introduces two of his best known characters: Jeeves, the perfect manservant, and his employer, Bertie Wooster. It may surprise you to find fun being made of parson' sermons, but preaching is not a sacred part of a church service, and the sermons of some country parsons have for long been a target for laughter. The sort of society described, the idle rich and vicarages with curates, butlers and reading parties, is one that has now disappeared from England, and some of the slang is dated. The title is from horse racing where horses

are handicapped by having to carry more or less weigh and bets are laid on which will win. The double plot of the story is very neatly built up with more than one unexpected denouement. If you don't know what this word means, look it up in your dictionary, then think of answers to the following questions:

1. Why did Bertie say to Bingo 'Leave me, laddie. Leave me to my fried egg'?
2. How much did the syndicate each lose?
3. Why did the Rev. Heppenstall think that Bertie's incredulity was flattering?
4. Why is the fact that Bertie had to make an early start to get to Lower Bingley essential to the plot of the story?
5. In what way did the Rev. Heppenstall's hay fever affec the plot of the story?

Shooting an Elephant

This story by the author of *Animal Farm* and *1984*. It has been slightly shortened.

What evidence is there in this story of the date when it was written?

What is meant by an elephant going *must*?

After reading this story, what do you feel about the author?

Collision in Thick Fog

Which is the port side of a ship, and what is the other side called?

What parts of a ship are the following: the bow or bows, the beam, the stern, the bridge?

Who is a naval rating?

What do the letters R.N.V.R. stand for?

Write a story about the same length describing a collision between two cars.